

ARGO

NAVIS.

More Than Melchisedech

Major.

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ROVER CAROL

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R. A. Lafferty



MORE THAN MELCHISEDECH

BOOK THREE OF THE
DEVIL IS DEAD TRILOGY

R. A. LAFFERTY



Books of Sand

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Book One

Early Boyhood of a Magus

*We know the sign athwart the wreck
The sign that hangs about your neck,
Where One more than Melchisedech
Is Dead and never dies.*

G. K. Chesterton
Ballad of the White Horse

Well, what do you think is maintaining the world on even its wobbly ways if it is not the extraordinary work of a few prodigious and special people in it? These people are known as magicians or sorcerers or magi: and this is the daily life of one of them.

He was Melchisedech Duffey. Like every magus, he arrived with many mantles of magic. Like every magus, he would lose most of them during his life. And such payments as he would receive for his losses would seem trivial or incomprehensible.

"I do not understand the value of these trifles I receive for the splendid things that I give up," another magus had complained once.

"If you are a true magus, you will understand it," one in higher authority said.

"And I go all my life in fear of assassination or even more mortal things," the magus complained.

"If you a true magus, you will not let these small things bother you," the Higher Authority said.

The True Magus Melchisedech Duffey had the golden touch. He could bang his hands together and produce graven gold or bar gold or coin gold. He was an invader of minds, moving in and out of the people with whom he was in accord as well as some with whom he was in clashing discord. To a limited extent, he was a Lord of Time, moving

back and forth in the streams of it almost at will. And he commanded invisible giants.

By talismanic device, he was able to manufacture persons, or at least to put his own fabricator's mark on unfinished human clay. This was his most powerful gift.

"Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life—" —these specifications seemed improbable for a mortal person like Duffey; and there *was* confusion about each of the items as applied to himself.

Duffey remembered three different childhoods in the present or twentieth century. It was hard to reconcile them because they occupied the same years. Duffey also remembered a much older and continuing life that was always with his like a backdrop. This older backdrop contained camel's hair tents flapping in the wind in a rocky country that was green with grass and golden with sunlight.

And there was a background sound that fit in imperfectly with the semi-desert atmosphere. It was the hooting of a particular ship's horn, a strong, golden and pleasant sound that could be produced by one ship only. Other people could not hear this ship's horn however loud it sounded.

In all other ways, Duffey was a pretty normal person. He had sorrel hair and fire-blue eyes. He would be a solid but not overly large man. He had a mouth that might start to grin before his eyes did. And he was constantly banging his hands together and shouting, "Yes, yes, my creature, we will do this thing right away." He might be shouting this to a clay chicken he had made with his hands, and to no one else at all.

For a very brief moment here, we dip into the latter-middle life of Duffey just before that life breaks up and moves in several directions, but mostly back in time from that latter day. For this one brief moment that we watch now, he is in

his own 'Duffey's Walk-in Art Bijou' in New Orleans. He is eating and drinking with a friend there, and he is contemplating an urn full of ashes that is on his cluttered table.

The urn is old and ornate and it had once belonged to a King of Spain. There is nothing odd about keeping an urnful of ashes on one's table, perhaps, but this case was a little different. The ashes were Duffey's own.

"The people whom you make, Duffey," said Mr. X who was the friend Duffey was eating and drinking with, "you haven't any real control over them, have you?"

"Over *them*? It's over *you*, X. You're one of the people I made. No, I haven't much control over the bunch of you. You're a 'how sharper than a serpent's tooth' crew."

"And someday you'll have to settle on one of your three childhoods to be the real one, Duffey," X said.

"Yes, but I won't settle on it yet. I'll keep my options open. What kind of man I can be today or tomorrow will always depend on what kind of boy I was yesterday. I really wish that I had more than three childhoods to choose from. But beyond these three I come on only fragments."

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Melchisedech Duffey, for one of his most likely childhoods, appeared in either Harrison or Shelby or Pottawattamie County in Iowa. The seven cities that disputed the honor of being his birthplace were Minden, Underwood, Beebee Town, Neola, Crescent, Avoca, and Union Township which was not properly a city at all.

Melchisedech used to say that he arrived on the night of the turn of the century, a night that also was claimed by the Papadiabolois and Mr. X and other portentous persons. Duffey

may have lied about this: he may have been several years younger than the century. And X may have lied about his own case. Likely he was several years younger than Duffey even.

A fact given by an older relative or pretended relative is that Melchisedech's mother had died when he was five years old and that thereafter he had lived with cousins until finally he came to live alone. When Duffey was twelve years old, he began to go to boarding schools, and that was the beginning of his living alone.

Duffey, between the ages of five and twelve, lived with cousins in little towns and on big farms in Iowa, and he lived with kindred in a number of cities: Dubuque, Sioux City, Council Bluffs, Omaha, Kansas City, St. Louis, Chicago, and Boston. The older relative also said that Duffey, far from being without kindred, had many relatives: the Duffeys themselves, the Kellys, Byrnes, McGuires, Crooks, Bagbys, Haleys, Healeys, Haydens, Kanes, Whites, Hughes, Kennedys, Thompsons, Clancys. This older relative also said that Duffey's original name was Michael and not Melchisedech.

"She is probably remembering my twin and not myself," Melchisedech said when told about it. "Those supposed kindred that she mentions are good people, and I know some of them. But they are not my kindred, and I have no genealogy through them. I was born without father and without mother, and I was five years old when I was born."

Here is a scene when Duffey was in Council Bluffs when five years old ("The year when I was born," said Duffey). It was in a park on Lake Manawa. People there were indulging in that weirdest of all total-body masquerades, 'going swimming'. There was a high diving board over one part of the lake and people were diving off of that board and disappearing into the water. Duffey believed that the words 'diving' and 'dying' indicated the same thing, as he had not observed either of them before.

“So that is the way they do it,” said Duffey, and he whacked his hands together. “I always thought that people died in the house, but how would you get rid of them if they died there? This is right, that the people disappear into Lake Manawa when they die.”

Other people were appearing from under the water, and this was a more frightening thing. The new people were coming up out of the lake. Duffey began to count the people who disappeared and those who appeared, and he found that their numbers were almost the same.

A strong man with black moustache and black hair and with a blue bathing suit dived into the water. After a very little while, a different strong man with black moustache and hair came up out of the water. This second man had an evil look, and he had flowing or blurred features. But he looked something like the first man, like a caricature or deformity of the first man. It was apparent now that the people who came up out of the water were evil people. They would have to be watched.

It went on. Those who dived in were bright and pleasant looking. Those who came out were mean, bad, twisted, with their faces half washed away or only half formed, just not shaped right. The good persons on the lake shore made uneasy way for these evil persons who came up out of the water.

One of the most evil of them all climbed up the ladder to the high diving board. It was as if he himself intended to dive into the lake as the good people were doing. Did they not notice that he was one of the bad ones who had come up out of the lake and had then sneaked into the line with the good ones? It made the flesh crawl.

That ‘thing’ that was going out now to dive off the board was the evil strong man who had come out of the water after the first strong man had gone in. What could such an evil creature change into a second time? Why was nobody strong enough to prevent him doing it?

Then Duffey knew that he himself was strong enough to prevent it. Should the monster come up out of the water after he had dived in, Duffey would enforce the condition that he should come out of it dead. There was spirit-wrenching on Duffey's part to come to this decision to intervene.

The monster dived into the water. Duffey prevented him from coming out of it again. There was a death struggle going on, inside the mind of the monster and inside the mind of Duffey, inside that water that was Lake Manawa and inside the water that is the oceanic matrix of everybody. Duffey kept the monster in his watery prison. He kept him there till he knew that he was dead. Then Duffey let go. "I just don't care any more," he said.

He couldn't see just what did happen afterwards. People gathered on the lake shore and in the waters of the lake itself. They were taking a great interest in a darkish form that they pulled out. People said that a man had drowned and that he looked absolutely dreadful, that he was strangled and horrifying.

Of course he was horrifying. But imagine how much more horrifying he would have been if he was alive when he came out of that water. That was the first time that Duffey ever killed.

In that park in Council Bluffs the squirrels are coal black. It is the only place in the world that has coal black squirrels.

There is another early scene. It's in Boston at about the same time. It is almost the only Boston scene in the Iowa-based childhood, though in later years, Duffey often passed himself off coming from Boston.

It was in a narrow park surrounded with buildings, and with a blue sky over it. White clouds were sliding into the blue of that sky. Melchisedech Duffey was with an older person, an uncle or cousin who called him Mikey.

"You can make cloud disappear by pointing at them, Mikey," the older person said. "Pick out one, the smallest one you can see till you learn how to do it. Now hate it with your whole mind, and you will make it disappear."

Melchisedech did point his finger at a little split-off fringe of cloud. He did concentrate on it in the spirit of hatred and extermination. And he did make it disappear. He was startled by his new-found power. This was the first real thing that he had ever made to disappear. Give a power like this room to operate and there was no limit to what it could do.

Melchisedech picked out a larger cloud fragment and made it disappear. And then he picked a still larger one. He could do it every time, and he felt the power standing up in him. If he picked out too large a cloud, it would leave the scene and slide behind buildings before he could finish with it. But every cloud that escaped his power was greatly diminished when it escaped.

"Is it working, Mikey?" the older person asked.

"Oh sure. Every time. Can all people do it?"

"All very smart people can do it. And some dogs can. Pointer dogs can do it best. They get rid of a lot of clouds. When you're wanting rain, then you always have to shut up the pointers in a shed where they can't see the clouds. There wouldn't be a cloud left in the sky otherwise."

Melchisedech diminished or completely destroyed about forty clouds that day. And the next day, he came back to the park again and destroyed about half that many. He had thought it would be easier the second day, but it was more difficult. The clouds were thicker and tougher that second day, and small pieces of cloud were hard to find.

The third day in the park was disaster for Duffey. The clouds covered almost the entire sky. It was hard to find small clouds to exterminate. All were rolling around and joining themselves to bigger clouds. Then Melchisedech found one and fastened onto it with pointing finger and

pointing mind. He commanded it to melt and disappear. It refused.

Duffey then used a word that compels obedience. He obliterated that cloud. Then he pushed all the clouds back from the center of the sky and left a sunny interval.

"Don't do that!" came a warning from somewhere. It was the voice of a demiurge.

"I *will* do it!" Melchisedech Duffey insisted. But it took more and more strength to hold the clouds apart. Then a lightning eye appeared right in the middle. Lightning came out of that eye and slashed open a tree in the park and buckled the pavement on the edge of the park, this not twenty feet from Duffey.

"Oh, if you're going to do that," Duffey said, "do it to these." Duffey held up a handful of sticks that he had taken from his pocket. Then, to horrified observers, it seemed that the lightning came down and struck the little boy's hand with blinding bolts, again and again, twelve times at least.

"Now they will have some fire and juice in them," Melchisedech said. "I wondered how I was going to get it into them."

People came and got Duffey and pulled him out of that little park and to the shelter of a nearby building. He yowled in fury at being dragged away. He wasn't beaten. He could have continued to hold the clouds apart, to push them even further apart, to destroy them all. He had just eased up on it for a moment to get the lightning to animate his sticks.

There's a sort of explanation to this. When damp and traveling air moves over dry and standing air, there will be masses and scatterings of white clouds produced. But these clouds will all melt back into the dry, standing air within minutes. You can watch the clouds fade on such a day. You can predict, when you learn the trick of it, just how rapidly they will melt. So it is no great trick, when conditions are right, to pick out a thin cloud and point a finger at it, and make it fade. Every cloud will be fading away into the air,

and new clouds will be forming and moving in, to fade in their turn.

But, on the following day, the dry standing air will have become less dry because of the clouds it has absorbed. Clouds may still fade away, but it will be a much slower process. Then (and it is usually in the night when the changeover comes) there is a dividing line after which the clouds will be growing instead of shriveling. They will grow and grow. They will swell up with lightning and noise. Then they'll break open in rain.

That is a neat explanation of the thing. It is even true, to a limited extent. And yet there were and would always be times when Melchisedech could command the winds and clouds and rains. He could do it all. But sometimes he was afraid of it, and he held back.

But an important thing had been done in that early encounter. The talisman sticks had been imbued with lightning.

On Duffey's first day in school (his first day in any school) he always found that the class was very unorganized. So he would bang his hands together and say: "It just seems that we are wasting our time here unless we introduce a little bit of system. I have some good ideas on the subject. We'll use them now."

"Oh Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, don't let there be a smart kid again this year!" Sister Mary Sabina prayed to herself out loud. This was Duffey's first day in school ever, and he was a little bit direct about things. "Why does there have to be a smart one every year?" Sister asked her heavenly friends.

"We can break the class up into mixed groups of fours," Melchisedech said, "with a responsible leader for each group. And we can—" This was insufferable from a five year old boy who shouldn't have been allowed into school for another year.

“Go ahead and organize it then,” Sister said. “You will anyhow. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, remember, when I come to my last agony, that I bore these things cheerfully.”

So Duffey organized his first class. He did a pretty good job of it too.

3

Now here's a bit about the three slant-faced persons. Duffey saw them the first time when he was about six years old.

They were three boys who were two years older and two years bigger than himself. They had slack mouths and slant faces, and they slouched along with their hands in their pockets and with knives in their hands. This was in the big town house where Duffey was living with some of his pretended kindred. It was the second largest house in town, and was on the top of the second highest hill.

Duffey was looking out of the Prisoner John Window when he first saw those three persons. That was a little, peaked, fourth-floor or attic window that was off of the high room where Melchisedech had his domain. It was not in the main attic room as were the other three high windows that looked out in three directions. The Prisoner John Window was in a little closet or cell off the main attic room. Duffey heard the three slant-faced boys in the road down below though they thought that they moved in silence. He came to the window to watch them. He saw them come to the door, and he heard his aunt-of-that-season open the door to talk to them.

“That little boy in this house, can he come out and play?” one of the slant-faces asked. And the other two slant-faces formed silent words, “We want to kill him” . But Duffey could read mouth.

"Oh yes, yes," said the aunt, And she came back into the house calling "Melky, Melky!" But Melchisedech Duffey was out of the opposite attic window and he swung by his vine-covered rope to a corner down-spout, and then down it to the ground like a hot-footed squirrel. He was out through the squash rows and the corn rows of the garden, and off into Mayfield's Meadow. And he stayed there for a couple of hours.

"There were three nice little boys here while you were gone. They wanted you to play with them but I couldn't find you," the aunt said when he returned.

"Oh nice little boys you nanny goat! " Melchisedech howled. "They're mean ones. They came to kill me."

"Oh Melky, what an imagination you have," the aunt exclaimed.

It was about two months later that Melchisedech saw the same slant-faced boys again. He had been for a morning walk, and he came back to the house. He looked up, and there were the three of them, inside the house, looking out of the Prisoner John Window. It was called the Prisoner John Window by Duffey if by no one else, because Prisoner John had once been held captive for twenty years in that little closet. He used to look out of that window all day. That was back in the Civil War days.

But now these three boys were inside the house itself, looking out of that high window and waiting for Duffey to come so that they might kill him.

"He sees us," one of the boys said.

"No. The sun's in his eyes. He can't see us," the second one said. "We'll wait for him here, and we'll kill him when he comes up," the third boy mouthed. Melchisedech was still some distance off, but he could read mouth. In fear and trembling he came up to the house. They'd kill him of course, but it was better to be killed than to let any of the big people know that you were afraid of anything.

"Melky, where were you?" the aunt asked suddenly from somewhere. "Your trunk is already in the buggy. You didn't forget that you were going to the country this morning, did you? It's time to get in the buggy now."

"I forgot it for just a little while," Melchisedech said.

"Is there anything you want to get from the attic before you leave?"

"No, there sure isn't anything I want to go up there for," he said. He got in the buggy to go and spend three months in the country, and he was chortling inside. He laughed at those boys spending all day and all night there for three months waiting for him to come back so they could kill him.

It was two months later that they heard in the country that the house in town had burned down. Everybody had gotten out of it all right, and nobody knew what had caused the fire.

"They knocked over the old wobbly lamp up there, that's what caused the fire," Melchisedech said, "and I hope that they didn't get out all right. If they rake the ashes good, they ought to find three strings of bones in them." But he was wrong.

Melchisedech hoped that he was rid of his three slant-faced enemies. And he thought that he was—for five years.

When Melchisedech was eight years old, he was living one winter in a middle-sized Iowa town with people who pretended to be his relations. He was one of the boys who served 6:30 mass every morning. The pretended relations lived right across the road from the church, so Melchisedech was able to get there no matter how deep the snow might be or how severe the storm.

The church had an old rope-operated bell. When pulled with sufficient force or weight, the rope would rock the bell into movement to send its heavy booming voice out over the whole town. This would be heard with a wakening delight by all persons except some of the Protestants.

But if the rope was pulled with insufficient force, there was no way that the bell could be set into motion. It would not stir or move at all to a light pull. It followed a quantum law. Too little was nothing at all to it.

So the institution of the 'fat altar boy' had come about. One of the four young boys who served every morning had to be heavy enough to set the bell into motion when he swung on the rope.

But there came a day when the fat altar boy was sick with pneumonia, and there was consternation among the other three of them. None of them was heavy enough to set the bell into motion when he swung on the rope. The other two cowards pointed at Melchisedech. So he had to be the 'fat altar boy' and he weighed only sixty-three pounds. The genuine fat altar boy had weighed a hundred and twenty pounds before he got the pneumonia.

Melchisedech said silent prayers. Then he made a mighty leap and caught the end of the rope. He dangled there and was unable to budge the mighty bell an inch. He dangled there, and he was impassioned with a golden fury. Was he a magician for nothing?

"I am the golden boy! I am the boy king!" he roared. He roared it not in sound but in some other medium. "It is mine to order. It is mine to command. I command that the hand of an invisible giant come down and help me to pull the rope."

It happened. The giant hand came down and seized the rope. The bell was rocked three times, higher and deeper each time, and then it broke into its beautiful and roaring sound. The people all over town woke with the secure feeling that it was a giant hand on the rope, and that it was the hand of a sanctioned giant. The giant was invisible, but the hand was visible. It was seen clearly by the other three boys.

"Who does the hand belong to?" they asked Duffey. "How could a hand be that big?"

"It belongs to one of my giants," Duffey told them. "They have to do anything I command them, but I'm always reasonable."

"How many of them are there?" the boys asked.

"There's about a dozen that I've used. I think there will always be as many as I need."

Well, Melchisedech was a boy magician and a boy-king, and he proved it several times. Many who saw his proofs have since died, or have forgotten about them. But several still remember.

Melchisedech was shunted from place to place quite a bit. Did he really have three separate and discrete childhoods at the same time, one of them mostly in Iowa, one of them in St. Louis, and one of them in Boston? This does not seem possible, but doubting it or denying it is not a real impediment to its having happened.

There is one explanation: that Melchisedech did have (in some context or other) a brother one year younger than himself and a sister or step-sister two years older than himself. These were living, in those years, with other kindred in other places. And the children were taken a great distance to visit each other almost every year. Some of the pretended kindred worked for railroads, and they and their families could travel free on all the lines so that there was no great expense involved on the trips.

Now the fact was that Melchisedech was an invader and ransacker and pirate of minds. He would visit with brother or sister for a week, and he could appropriate and keep every experience that brother or sister (step-sister) had had for a whole year, every touch and seeing and feeling and smell and notion and daydream. Or at least one of the three young persons could do such things, could be such a pirate as to steal all the experiences of the other two. And this one of them, whichever he was, bore the group name of Melchisedech.

This may explain some of the anomalies about the St. Louis childhood. This is the most intricate of all of them and it is wrapped in baffling symbolism and allegories. This was mainly the childhood of the sister-person, which doesn't prevent it being the authentic childhood. Everything seems to have a second meaning here: it is one rich tangle. When, in later years, Melchisedech had himself analyzed, this particular rich tangle became a prime target for the analyst. There was concatenated strangeness in it. There were motifs of high artistry running all through it. There was sublimity of concept, and something new in transference and understanding. Yes, and there was a slightly bovine element in it that was not in Melchisedech Prime. Then, under the forceful pursuit of the analyst, the tangle quacked once, laid an addled egg, and expired.

"I do not know how it came about," the analyst said, "but at one period of your life, for half a dozen of the early years, you were a girl. I mean it. You were a girl physically and mentally and psychically. Can you fill me in on that?"

"Nah," Duffey had said. He had asked for his bill, paid it, left the analyst without another word. But he laughed a lot about it privately.

But it was true that Melchisedech was an invader and ransacker and pirate of minds. There could be forty Melchisedech-aged children in a small town, and Melchisedech would have entered the minds of all of them and appropriated the contents. He would know every detail of the insides of every one of their families, and in great fullness and feeling. He knew so much about people and places that both people and places came to fear him. Oh how he had the details!

There was a shingle-block that served as a back step for one house. There was a wooden 'crossing' on a street that he did not use (the 'crossings' bridged the mud gutters from dirt paths to dirt roads) that was of wood a little different from its fellows, and Melchisedech would remember details

of grain and color of that crossing for more than fifty years. There was a notched ear on one of the big coach horses in the livery stable; there was box-elder wood in the wood box of one of the houses, and elm wood in the wood box of the next house. Some of these things were known by acute observation and memory, and some of them were robbed from other minds. But it was all one realm to Melchisedech.

There were sacks of hazel nuts on the back porches of some houses, and sacks of walnuts on the back porches of others. But in St. Louis, sometimes, they had gunny sacks full of pecans. There were red squirrels in Iowa and gray squirrels in St. Louis. But in Boston they didn't even know what a squirrel was.

And there were the iron words of household things, many of the words stolen out of minds. There were pump handles with the iron words 'Acme Pump Company' on them, and pump handles with the words 'Rock Island Pump Company'. There were other iron letters on other handles and bodies: 'Binghampton' or 'Wisconsin' or 'Burn' or 'Cheese Factory' on covers of milk cans, 'Peerless' or 'Sears' on the handles of cream separators, 'Sturgis' or 'Curtis Improved' or 'Star Barrel' on churns, 'Armstrong's' on cheese presses, 'S.R. & Co.' or 'Peter Wright' on anvils, 'Schofields' or 'Auto Ball Bearing' on grindstones, 'Red Ridge' or 'Hubbard's' or 'Jamestown' on axe heads. Melchisedech loved stolen iron words that really belonged to other households than his own. He loved everything that was noticed by anyone else, and he appropriated it to himself. In McGuire's house, they had a potty that came all the way from Philadelphia. Melchisedech could see it plainly, with the scrolled porcelain words on it. And he had never been in McGuire's house. But enough of that.

Behind all these flimsy things in the temporal world, there was a more genuine childhood in which Melchisedech was the Boy King, in which he had been the Boy King for

thousands of years. This was the solid base behind all the lives. The other and later things are the shadows of it. The Boy King with the golden hands was real. His dromedary hide tents were real. His flocks and his green pastures and his silver rivers were genuine. His groves of figs and dates and olives and apricots and pomegranates were more real than were the apple trees of Iowa or the plum and peach trees of Missouri. His fields of sesame and millet were more real than the wheat and cornfields of Iowa and Nebraska. His tobacco bushes and incense bushes and coffee bushes were living reality. His grape vines were authentic, and his silk worms were valid. His silk from camel and ass and ewe and gazelle and cow and India buffalo was milk in actuality. He had meat from all these animals, and from all harts and stags, from the swift pigs of Persia, and from a hundred sorts of fowl. He was the Boy King with the golden hands. He set out bread and wine for all visitors, sometimes more than a million of them a day, and he performed miracles without seeming to do so.

Mostly he called up giants, both visible and invisible, to effect his miracles. They could break up rocks and boulders and permit springs and rivers to flow. They also could bring about the 'Slaughter of the Kings', of rival kings. For cures of blindness and lameness, Melchisedech would place his own golden hands on the ailing parts, and the physician could then effect cures. Melchisedech could turn stones into birds and set them to flying. The world would long since have run out of birds if it had not been for this.

Mostly Melchisedech kept his powers hidden. He was always there in his full powers, but one of his powers was invisibility. Melchisedech kept his person as the Boy King invisible most of the time. The body he wore was known as the 'urchin disguise'.

And Melchisedech had talismans: nobody knows how many of them. Every time he gave one away, he somehow received or made another one to take its place. He had

given the first one away when he was no more than three years old, to an Italian man who was selling little cakes out of a hokey-pokey pushcart. And this was to bring about or create the first of the persons who would make up the Duffey Nation. These talismans, which represented special gifts or blessings or graces or formations, especially to one not yet born, cannot be easily described.

"He got the first of them out of a box of crackerjacks," said Aunt Mary Ellen Hart (one of the pretended kindred), "but it's much bigger now than it was when he got it out of the box, and I just don't know how that came about. I don't know what he made all the others out of, but he made them to look quite a bit like the first one. And he keeps other things, Charles. He keeps jars full of blood and such things."

"I used to do that too," said Charles Hart, one of the pretended uncles. "There's no harm in having jars of blood. You can catch weasels if you have blood around. They'll come to it. There's no harm at all in that boy."

Melchisedech gave these talismans to various persons, mostly on sudden impulse to persons he had never seen before. They were always to powerful effect, working their way on unborn kindred of these people. This was part of the process by which Duffey actually manufactured people.

Here is a bit when Duffey was about eleven years old. For several weeks he had been visiting kindred on a farm where he had never been before. It was early summer and early morning. Melchisedech had gone out through orchards to a field of timothy hay. He lay down there, just about a rod from a fence corner and within the hay. The timothy was tall, and Melchisedech was completely hidden.

He heard several sounds. Two sounds were from the bush-grown fence-rows. One was from the extent of timothy hay toward the center of the field. These three sounds were intended to be muffled.

Then there was another sound so soft that it needed no muffling at all. It was followed by a little yelping bark that was rusty from disuse. It was a fox bark. Melchisedech knew foxes, but this one he knew in a different way from the regular foxes of the field. The yelping bark came again, more insistently.

Melchisedech sat up. Then he leapt to his feet and was running.

A person may live all his life in kit-fox country and see none or maybe one of these smallest foxes. And he would have to live ten lives in kit-fox country before he heard the rusty yap of one of them. But Melchisedech saw and heard the kit-fox now. He knew what it was, for it was his totem animal. And he knew that it had come to warn him.

The kit-fox was as sorrel of hair as was Duffey. He was as grinning of mouth and as apprehensive of eye as Duffey was. "But for size, we look about the same," Duffey took time to think as he ran and as he weighed other things with his own apprehensive eyes. Two of the slack-mouthed, slanted-faced boys were coming over the two corner jags of the fence. Another of them was coming out of the deep timothy ahead of Duffey, and Duffey was surrounded. Melchisedech Duffey had grown since he had seen these boys before, but they had grown faster. They were still quite a bit older and quite a bit bigger than he was. They intended to kill him, and they had caught him cold. Which way to go? Duffey was already going. He was going the way the kit-fox went.

The kit-fox, which avoids humans more than does any other of North America, made for one of the boys who was clearing the fence. So Duffey made for him too. Any way that Duffey should veer off, the boys would have the interceptors' angle on him, and they would have his back or flank undefended to their knives.

The kit-fox took the slant-faced boy low to make him suitable, and Duffey took him high to bowl him over. Then

Duffey cleared the fence with a leap as high as his own head, and he had all three of the boys behind him. They'd not catch him now if he could outrun his own blood loss. What blood loss? Duffey was startled to find how badly he was bleeding.

That slant-faced boy had knifed Duffey deeply, and he knew how to use a knife. He'd have killed Duffey if the kit-fox hadn't slashed him as sharply as to make him stumble and to give Duffey the edge to bowl him over.

Duffey very nearly bled to death from that one, but his fortune held. He was staunched and saved, and in ten days he was well. It had been a providential kit-fox that Duffey had seen, of course. No other kind is ever seen.

4

But childhoods, even gold or sorrel-colored childhoods, are quickly lived through. (This doesn't apply to the basic childhood which goes on for thousands of years.) There are simply not very many years to a regular childhood. When he was twelve years old, Melchiscdech Duffey was sent away to the first of his boarding schools. So, by his own count at least, his young manhood had begun.

Other things being equal, it is only the difficult child-people who are sent away to boarding schools for their early high school years. And when the difficult child-people go, there is always an odd sound behind them, the sound of hands being washed. The hands are being washed, by parents, by guardians, by kindred, by (in a special case here) well-meaning pretended kindred.

The more difficult children, of course, are those who are sent away even before they reach the high school years, so Melchisedech had not been one of the outrageously difficult

ones. He had never given people trouble. He had only given them unease, as being something out of the cuckoo's nest and not out of their own.

But Duffey's three new friends, with whom he now formed a conspiracy and consensus, would fall into the outrageously difficult class by this test. It had an advantage. They knew their way around boarding schools. Yet they seemed to be the three brightest and most intelligent and most pleasant persons ever. Well, Charley Murray was sleepy a lot of the time, and yet he was bright.

This Charley Murray was from St. Louis. Charley and Melchisedech discovered that they knew many of the same people there. That Melchisedech knew them only out of the mind of his sister or stepsister and not from his own encounters was something that he did not tell Murray. Murray did magic tricks. He had a dozen magic sets and a score of magic trick books. When he discovered that Melchisedech was apt with his hands and with tools, he had him make many props for new magic acts. Melchisedech was a born carpenter and joiner and cabinet maker. He was a born machinist and pattern maker: and lathes and such were available in the Manual Training section of the school. Melchisedech was a good metal spinner and wood turner and mold caster.

There were some things that could not be made by any of the trades or techniques however. And yet they were made. They were made after Melchisedech had received Murray's request that he needed them. And they were made in the middle of the night. But there were no tools sophisticated enough to make them with, none available there.

"What do you use to make them, Melky, brownies?" Charley Murray demanded once. And this seemed to perturb Melchisedech. 'Brownie' is a vague word, but as a popular description it might have hit just what Melchisedech did use. Very large Brownies, if you want to call them that.

“Why do you ask how this was made,” Melchisedech growled as he gave that new-made prop to Charley Murray. “It was made to order. It was made to my order. That's how it was made. Ask no more about it.”

The order by which the most extreme things were made was sometimes an order given by Melchisedech to one of those ebony giants. So a thing might have been made by giant hands that are stronger than a drill press and cannier than a mortising machine. It was only by accident that Charley Murray soon discovered that Duffey had faber-giants under his command. And it was only by accident that he discovered that as he Murray could work magic tricks, so he Duffey could work real magic that was not trickery. This discovery did not completely reverse their relationship to each other (Charley was inventive in ways that Duffey could never be, and Charley was an older boy, and he had developed early leadership qualities), but it did compel in Charley a new and permanent respect for Melchisedech Duffey.

Another of the intimates was John Rattigan from Chicago. John was a scrambler and money-maker. He, like Murray, was about two years older than Duffey. He had a witty look, and the look sufficed. You'd spot him with that ‘I'm-going-to-take-you’ grin, and you'd be wary of him, and he'd take you anyhow. He knew every wholesaler of gadgets and sundries in town, sellers of candy and fruit and tobacco and such. He bought from them all, and he sold clandestinely to the two hundred boarding school boys and the three hundred and fifty day students of the school. He made fast and happy money out of his enterprises. He cut corners. And he sold the corner-cuts far more than the full pieces were worth.

There was Sebastian Hilton who was the first of them in so many ways. Sebastian already had fast and happy money and didn't have to make it. He was the de-luxe rich kid. He was even younger than Melchisedech, the only one out of the hundred and fifty boys in the ninth grade who was

younger. And he was slight. He had what the ladies call a 'not-long-for-this-world' look. Nah, he wasn't long for this world. He had a better world on order and it was being built for him. It would be very expensive and parts of it were being brought from France and Italy. But Sebastian did look puny with his pale, greenish complexion.

Well, he was like a puny panther. You would put on the gloves with him at your peril. He was the fastest kid with his hands that you ever saw, and to fight him with gloves was suicide. To fight him bare-fisted was worse. He was a diabolical schemer and he took unfair advantage of the bullies. He had a whole assembly of come-ons, a bait box to hook the most rancid bully. He had a simper he could use when he chose. He had effeminate gestures that he could slip into. He could even go into tears at a moment's notice, and what bully-boy could resist that?

"Don't do it, Sebash, don't do it!" Charley Murray used to bet. "It's cruel and unusual." Charley had a lot of compassion, and Charley and Sebastian had previously been to school together elsewhere. "Don't do it, Sebash. He's too big and awkward. He'll get hurt."

But Sebastian would stalk his prey with simpering and tears. And what a sickening, sissy, sleazy kid Sebastian could be when he wanted to! And the climax would always be well-witnessed, for Sebastian Hilton had a perfect sense of the theatrical. He could lay almost any face open, but especially a fat face, with his fast angling fists and the sharply embossed rings that he wore on each hand. He could rack a big boy completely with body punches that were only about eight inches too low. He knew all the tricks out of the special combat books.

And a slight boy is always lionized after he takes the measure of a larger boy, after identifying that larger boy so conspicuously as a bully. "Baw, lemmy alone, you big bully!" was Sebastian's favorite squawl. It was sickening.

"I wish he'd trade that in for another line!" Charley Murray used to moan. But Sebastian knew better than to change a good line before it was worn out. Sebastian shed a lot of blood. He entrapped and scuttled a number of hulking kids before both the boarders and the day students got onto his game. And, if he ever over-matched himself, Sebastian was as fast afoot as he was with his hands.

In the gymnasium, Duffey found that he could take Sebastian with his fists, or with borrowed giant fists. But Duffey wasn't big, and Sebastian had never entrapped him. They were friends and they fought only for fun in the gym.

But there was another way that Duffey could never take Sebastian, never in this world. And it hurt. Duffey had to admit that Sebastian was smarter than himself. Duffey had never before met a boy that was smarter than himself, and he was unprepared for such a thing. This would be the only clear-cut case in Duffey's life or lives that he would find anyone absolutely smarter than himself. There would be half a dozen close ones, but no other case of clear superiority.

John Rattigan wanted a talisman from Duffey, and Duffey wouldn't give it to him.

"No, no, it just won't work, John," Duffey insisted. "It just isn't meant to be. Something would go wrong, I know it would. You are not one of the people I'm supposed to give a talisman to."

"But I don't believe in them," Rattigan insisted. "There is nothing can go wrong if I don't believe in them."

"I won't do it, John," Duffey still protested. "I do believe in them, and something will go wrong. They're not to play with."

Then one day Rattigan gave Duffey a wrapped package. "Hold this for a minute, Melky," he said. And Duffey held it, but he felt through the wrappings that something was wrong. Then Rattigan took it back from Duffey and unwrapped it. It was a talisman that Rattigan had made as a copy of Duffey's talismans, and it was a good copy.

“Good! It's a perfect copy,” Rattigan crowed, “and I tricked you into holding it in your hands. Now your power has gone into it. It will work!”

“If it works, it will work wrong,” Duffey said darkly. Rattigan understood only about half on the matter of the talismans. Duffey himself understood only about two-thirds. But Sebastian, with his quick and unearthly mind, understood it all from the beginning.

Well, where *was* this school that Melchisedech Duffey was now attending? And what was its name? Well, there isn't any one set of answers to those questions.

Possibly it was Creighton in Omaha. Did they not have a high school as well as a college in those years. Or it may have been Loras in Dubuque, or Rockhurst in Kansas City, or it might have been that boys' boarding school in the shadow of St. Louis University. Really, there wasn't two nickels' worth of difference in those places. And, as a matter of fact, the ‘school’ was at least two of the places named.

Melchisedech's four years of boarding school high school, while it was all a single experience, did not all happen in the same place. He changed schools at least once, and possibly twice. And those other difficult boys were used to changing schools. Melchisedech Duffey and Charley Murray were together all those four years, but there was a year or so when John Rattigan turned into Delbert Dugan and when Sebastian Hilton turned into Martin Troyat, this to preserve the group of four. Sebastian reappeared in the last year, however. He'd been to school in Europe in the interval. He was with Melchisedech the first and last year of their four year experience.

The four boys, being good students who didn't have to spend a lot of extra time over books, went out a lot. They all had money. Melchisedech had some of that hand-washing money with which his false kindred had sluffed him off, and he had money that he made in ventures with John Rattigan.

Rattigan had money from his own scrambling and scheming. Sebastian had money because he was a rich kid. And Charley Murray had money because he was one of the St. Louis Murrays.

The boys would catch the movies first-run downtown. They saw every vaudeville bill that came to the city. They ate at downtown restaurants where the meals might run as high as sixty cents. And they sat on stools at that short bar between the kitchen and the long bar in Traveler's Saloon.

Traveler had no objection to serving twelve and thirteen year old boys when he knew them to be sensible. He served them small glasses of whisky at five cents a glass, and John Rattigan bought a full quart to retail to his school mates in money-making mixtures. He did this twice a week.

They ate German lunches. They rode streetcars, and went to ice cream parlors. And only when it was after ten o'clock at night and they knew that all the doors were locked at the school did they return there along California Street, or along whatever street it might be in whatever town was the scene that year.

They would climb over the walls that surrounded the school area. Then they would climb the walls of their own building within the area. John Rattigan the scrambler climbed like a monkey. Sebastian Hilton climbed like a squirrel. Melchisedech Duffey climbed like a competent and careful boy of intelligence and agility, and one who knew that he could call on giant hands for support if he needed them.

But Charley Murray climbed in nightly terror. He was the tallest of them and had the greatest reach. But sometimes, mid-way in a climb, he would freeze in fear. And yet he would force himself to it. He would make it all the way up with them, up the walls and through the windows.

Then it would be low-wick lamp time in the rooms, and stuff-the-door-crack time. The merchants Rattigan and Duffey would set out their merchandise for the ten-thirty

market if it was a store night. And Charley Murray and Sebastian Hilton would fling themselves feverishly into their books, for a very little while.

Sebastian was as fast of mind and eye as he was of hand and foot. He devoured books in every tongue of the world, as he said. Really he had traveled in France and Italy, and he was far and away the best first-year French Student in the school. He was the best first-year student at everything: Latin, Greek, English Composition, Algebra, American History, Religion. And he was the best customer that Rattigan and Duffey had for their book sales.

Rattigan and Duffey bought and sold a hundred or so books, new and used every week. Rattigan had a feel for value and profit in books. Duffey didn't have it at first, but he pirated the mind and thinking fingers and eyes of Rattigan till he had a pretty good feel for money worth.

Melchisedech also ransacked and pirated the minds of Charley Murray and Sebastian Hilton. From Murray he received a great good nature and an easy honesty, and the Lace Curtain Irish elegance. He would go back and dip into that mind for the rest of his life whenever he felt himself becoming despondent, whenever he felt himself becoming dishonest.

From Sebastian he pirated a really extensive and light-suffused intelligence and infallible taste. There was no way he could appropriate the complete swiftness of the Sebastian mind, and there were things in that mind that assumed their proper shape only under the conditions of high speed. But Duffey could handle very much of what he found there. But to the store again.

If it was a store night, the boys would come in with the merchandise about twenty minutes after ten o'clock. The boys brought stuff they wished to sell, and Rattigan and Duffey would take the things and sell them on commission. They didn't make a great amount on the commission sales: they were mostly an accommodation. But these floating

items did add to the attractiveness and volume of the merchandise and they gave a good setting to the profit items.

The sales ran front ten-thirty to midnight on sale nights, about three nights a week. Candy and sandwiches were on sale every night, but not the full line of merchandise. The sales were held by candle light or by kerosene lamp. After curfew bell, at ten minutes to ten, the gas was turned off to the boys' rooms from ten o'clock at night till five o'clock in the morning. Boys were not to have gas lights available during the hours for sleep.

So it was always dim light for the sales, and Rattigan didn't really need his green eye shade in that faint light. But it had become his trade mark. There was lots of food for sale. There was new sheet music and new magazines as well as books. There were carbonated drinks, and there were water-mix sweet drinks. They had root beer and ginger beer, California Fruit chewing gum, coffee and tea and cocoa, candies and sweet bulls. There were the always popular pigs' feet.

At about mid-point in a sale, Charley Murray would put aside his reading and would do several new and stunning magic tricks for the customers. Candle light and low-wick kerosene light give great advantage to magic acts that might be exposed as trickery by the strong, white illumination of gaslight fixtures.

There was a whisky bar for the older boys. Thirteen year old John Rattigan was firm in his refusal to sell to anyone under sixteen years old. They sold the small glasses of watered whisky for ten cents each and seven cents of that was profit. There would be as many as a hundred boys coming to some of the sales, and as much as ten dollars profit. But when midnight rang on the ghostly bell across the area, no more transactions might begin.

"Time, gentlemen!" John Rattigan would announce. "Quickly, quickly, let us wind it up quickly. " And they would

wind it up as quickly as they could. When the last of the customers was gone, the four boys who lived in the room would pray, and then they'd go to bed. Rattigan was always the last one. He would blow out the final candle. He would undress in the dark, for he was curiously modest. He would take off his green eye shade last of all. Then he would go to bed.

So they lived out their days in enterprise and diligence and happiness and learning and purity.

5

'Chastity is the lily among virtues and makes men almost equal to angels. Nothing is beautiful but what is pure, and the purity of men is chastity. Chastity is called honesty, and its possession honor. It is also called integrity, and its opposite, corruption. In short, it has its own peculiar glory of being the fair and unspotted virtue of both soul and body.'

—St. Francis de Sales

Castitas, castitas, and the peculiar chastity of mind that is the requirement of the highest intelligence! These were correct definitions and statements. Not one of the boys ever became so base as to depart from these definitions or to use words to mean their opposites. These four were good boys who had never been corrupted, and several of them would never be corrupted in any of their worlds or lives. Melchisedech Duffey would suffer a little corruption now and then, but he never repudiated the definitions or defended corruption as anything other than the opposite of integrity.

Everybody has lived in a golden age. Quite a number of persons continue to live in one.

As to his special state in life, Duffey had already made all the explanations possible. He had selected an older priest of the school as his confessor, and he had explained that he was a true magician and sorcerer and magus. This was

accepted, and was always taken into account. Melchisedech was told that a magus was subjected to peculiar temptations in life: overweening pride and other things; and he was given much good advice.

There was, as it happened, in the neighborhood and in the acquaintance of the boys, a Lily among the virtues who was also a beauty without blemish. The boys held Sunday afternoon sales that were licit. These were allowed and approved by the Jesuit masters of the school. To the Sunday sales would come many of the day students as well as the boarders. And also non-students would come, and students from other schools, friends, visitors, grown-up people, even girls. One of the girls who came most often was Lily Koch.

As a merchant, Lily was the counterpart of Rattigan and Duffey. She merchandised at St. Mary Major's School for Girls, a combination boarding school and day school. And Lily was a combination student. She was a boarding student when she wished to be, and she had a private room such as only the richer students had. And she was also a day student when she wished to be, for she had rich and powerful kindred who lived in a mansion that was directly across the road from the front gate of St. Mary Major's. In her room at school, she held a Wednesday night sale which was private, and in the house of her kindred she held a Saturday morning sale which was public. This Saturday morning sale was sometimes in the big living room and sometimes on the veranda, depending on the weather.

Lily lacked one item for her Wednesday night sales and she asked the boys to get it for her. Boys could go in some places where girls couldn't. So Duffey began, once a week, to buy Lily a quart of better whisky than he and Rattigan sold to their own customers. Lily could get shaved ice. She could get French bitters and such things. She served her classmates classier drinks than the boys ever knew the names of.

Lily sold art at the Saturday morning public sales. Duffey had hardly known what art was. But it came to him now like a revelation, and he would have to know all about it.

One Saturday morning, Sebastian Hilton bought a small piece of statuary from Lily Koch for one hundred dollars. He paid her in cash after finding that he had left his checkbook back at school. Rich kids can pay other rich kids such sums without turning the least shade green. And Melchisedech knew with furious exasperation that the statuette was really worth the hundred dollars, and that the taste of these two young persons was worth all the hammered gold in the world. There were other art things there: pictures, locketts, statues, weavings to hang on the wall, porcelain figures, iron figures, bronzes. There were also insufferably cute pieces to be sold to insufferably cute grown-up customers, and Duffey felt the laughing disdain of Lily when she sold such.

Melchisedech invaded, ransacked, and pirated the minds of Sebastian Hilton and Lily Koch for this new thing. He also ransacked the minds of several grown-up persons who came to some of Lily's sales. And Melchisedech, with what he pirated and ransacked, and with what he already possessed unknowingly, became an instant art expert. Art expert was one of the vocations to which he would be faithful all his life. The part that he lifted from Sebastian did not have the high-speed condition of other things that he lifted from that mind. The judgments he got there on this were in absolute balance at any speed or at no speed at all.

He encountered other things in the mind of Lily Koch. She knew when he was there. She came and talked with him there in an old way that is closer than words. She told him to come any time he wished, that she would put up a pavilion for him there, and that he should put up a dromedary-hide tent for her there. But would she remember in the world what she told him in her mind? Yes, she would and she did. She was very friendly and very easy with Melchisedech.

At her sales, Lily did not use a green eye shade as John Rattigan did. For her trademark as merchant, she used to snap on celluloid cuffs or gauntlets. They were more common than they are now. And when high noon struck on Saturday, she would cry, "Time, ladies and gentlemen! Quickly, quickly!" And after the customers were all gone, she would put away her things and unsnap her celluloid cuffs until next sale time.

One Saturday morning, Melchisedech Duffey brought one of his talismans and gave it to Lily Koch.

"It is for you," he said simply, and then he attempted to bolt out of the room. Lily hooked him by the collar and jerked him back.

"Wait, wait, wait!" she cried. "This can't be for sale. It isn't allowed to sell them. This is real. Anyone can see that this is something special and cannot be sold."

"No, it's not to sell, Lily. I want to give it to you so you can give it to somebody else someday. Take it. I have to leave now."

"Wait, wait!" she jerked him back. "But this is genuine. Who is it from?"

"It's from myself, Lily. You will give it to someone. I don't know how to say it, and you don't know what I mean."

"Oh, I know what you mean. Sebastian told me that you were one of the magi, and I had already about guessed it. They are the only ones who could give something shaped like this. One could form an extraordinary person with one of these. One could pour almost everything into such a person. But there's nothing that I can do with it, Melky. I'm already born and, beyond that, I'm already finished. And I will never have any children of my own."

"I thought that you might give it, well, to—"

"Oh, to her? I didn't know you even knew about her. Why couldn't it have been me instead? I don't think that it'll work, but we'll try it if you wish. She is already born, but she

sure is empty-headed. So this is what she's been waiting for! I love her, and you will also. Trust me. I'll do what I can. It may work. Sure it'll work."

"You do what you can with it, Lily," Melchisedech said. "I guess they might not work every time."

"Why couldn't it have been you and I, Melky?" Lily asked. Two twelve year old persons, and they were asking, 'Why couldn't it have been you you and I' as if something were irrevocable. And it was irrevocable.

Lily looked at Melchisedech with level eyes and then kissed him on the mouth.

"You get out of here now," she said. "You hand out magic like that, and you don't even know what it is."

No, Duffey didn't yet understand very much about his own talismans. He was glad that Lily Koch seemed to understand part of it at least.

6

In one thing and by latter standards, the four boys were not very precocious. Forty or fifty years later, it would be a case that baseball and sex and kindred subjects were organized and regimented and made compulsory from the third grade of school on. The things have backfired, but the failures have not been recognized. "I tell you," a man said just the other day, "they organize it all too early. I tell you that early regimentation turned me against both baseball and sex forever." That was a double ruin. In the childhood of Duffey, it was not quite so organized as it later became, and yet it was organized.

Even in those old decades the compulsion had begun. A series of dances was arranged every year and attendance was compulsory. Duffey and Rattigan and Murray knew girls, but they didn't know 'girls'. Sebastian, who had been in

France and Italy, knew a little bit more about 'girls'. He had, in fact, had an affair with a countess, he said. And affairs with countesses are closely regimented. This claim was something for the other boys to hoot at him for, and they hooted. But Sebastian wasn't at all abashed. It was true, he insisted. And yes, he admitted it had been funny. He wished that he was at liberty to tell just how funny it really was.

And Duffey, dipping into the Sebastian mind, found that there really was a countess and that she was now twelve years old. Duffey even extracted the information (not from Sebastian — he couldn't have known it — but from the fates somewhere) that he Duffey would someday make the acquaintance of this Countess and that she would be his close friend.

But that didn't solve the problem of the dances. The first of the series was to be held in the fine home of Lily Koch's kindred as this was a very large house and very handy to the girls' school, and as the family was very pushy about such things. Twenty-five of the boarding boys of Duffey's school were to escort twenty-five girls from St. Mary Major's.

"Oh, there has to be a way out of it," Charley Murray would mutter, and he would chew off all his fingernails and half of his fingers.

"They can't make me do it. They can't make me go," Duffey would growl.

"If we're going to our doom, then let us go elegantly," Sebastian Hilton offered. "And sharpen up a little bit, boys. Wear gloves if you have any. And scarves. I've hired a carriage for this evening. We'll do it in style."

It was early October and still warm, and they really didn't need either gloves or scarves.

"It's only three blocks to the girls' school," said Rattigan who was parsimonious. But the others jeered him down. If they had any chance at all, it would be to go in style. One other rich kid in school had hired an automobile and driver

to take himself and his party, but what possible style was there in an automobile?

So Sebastian's hired carriage with liveried driver pulled up for them that night. The carriage had style and the coachman had style. It even had a post-boy's horn on which Charley Murray blew rousing notes. The horses were Cleveland Bays, and there were no more stylish horses in the world. The carriage and the jouncing ride in it were enough to lift the spirits of any condemned persons.

Even at St. Mary Majors where they arrived with their style drooping only a little bit, the situation was eased by their friend Lily Koch being one of the four girls the boys were to pick up.

"Who will squire whom?" Sebastian asked out of his orderly mind.

"Nobody will squire anybody," Lily stated. "They think they can make us do it that way, but they can't. We will all be together, and nobody will be with anyone else."

That was like new life being given to dying people. They went out, and the four girls got into the carriage. What, got into the carriage just to go across the street? Sure, to ride around a dozen blocks and then to end up across the street. The carriage was made to hold four, and there were eight of them. The four guys piled in too, and they went for a happy and whopping ride. Charley Murray was very good on that post-horn, and he gave them some hectic tunes. They were fox-hunting tunes. The boys were only with girls on that carriage ride. They were not yet with 'girls'.

The fun remained till they made their circuit of quite a few blocks and arrived at their destination across the road from the girls' school and dismounted and entered the big house. And then, in the face of the arrangements and formality and scrutiny, it all shriveled.

Oh flushing horror, they were going to make them pair off! And they were going to make the boys shake hands with the girls. The boys had sat on the girls' laps in the carriage,

but they were too flustered to shake hands with them in public. And some of the girls were even more shook.

"I'm going to write my mother to take me out of this school," Mary Anne Michaels said. "I'm going to tell her that I'll kill myself if I can't get out of this school and go home. And I will kill myself if she says no. But how will that help tonight?"

"I know how I can get out of it," said the girl named Sedalia Schoefeld. "I know a trick so I can vomit whenever I want to. I'll play real sick. Then they'll have to let me go back across the road and go to bed."

"Wait! Turn this way. Get some on me!" Lily Koch cried. "Then they'll have to let me go across the road to change my dress, and I won't come back." But Lily was laughing.

"Wait kids," she said. "There's better ways. Follow me. I know places to go."

Lily knew that house. They went through big rooms and down long hallways. They went up back stairways. Somehow they were up in the sound-proofed billiard room in the attic. (The sound of ivory balls striking against each other affected the lady of that house perishingly, so this was the most sound-proof room in town.)

They had a good time up there, the eight of them. They played Kelly pool and rotation. They had two victrolas there, one with the old cylinder records, one with the new disc records. They played rag music and they danced rag dances. But they sure wouldn't have endured the formalized horror of dancing at the dance downstairs. There was food and drink there, from Lily's stock from across the street and from a couple of stores and pickle houses and confectioners in Germantown. And just from the big kitchen downstairs. It was good eating. All the boys and girls had been too nervous and upset in the stomachs to eat before coming to the dance.

There was some of that Germantown wine. There was rag music and jazz music and even honey-bunny music on the

victrolas, and they had a fine time of it.

But why, persons of a cruder era might ask, could they not have had a fine time at the formalized dance downstairs? Oh, such people don't know anything, not anything.

Mary Anne Michaels became very friendly with Charley Murray. Sedalia Schoefeld became very friendly with Rattigan. Edith O'Dwyer made conversation with Duffey but Lily Koch teased about Duffey really being her boy. Sebastian shot the best pool, but perhaps it wouldn't always be so. It was just that he had shot more of it. Duffey felt the talent for that table rising in him, and Charley Murray said that they would have a pool table put in their house at home for Christmas of that year.

Oh, the hours went by pleasantly enough. And when their sense of time started to come around (Sebastian had a gold watch, but the cover on it was stuck and wouldn't open, so they didn't know for sure what time it was), they cracked the door of the sound-proof room so they could hear the break-ups and departures.

When that turmoil had crested but was not quite completed, the eight young persons went down the back stairs and out the back door and then around to their carriage, and piled in it, and were away again. Duffey had the post-horn this time, and he blew it with vigor.

"Stay with it, Melky," said Lily who held him on her knees and who was very fond of him. "Enthusiasm beats talent every time. Blow dear, blow." They went around another dozen blocks with singing and squealing and horn-blowing, and they stopped right across the road from where they had started, in front of the big iron front gate of St. Mary Major's.

They all kissed in the carriage. Then, when they came through the gate and through the door, they could truthfully say that they had already done it. Their words were

accepted and that was good. None of them could have done it under scrutiny.

It wasn't too fearsome going to dances, if only you could avoid going to the dances, themselves.

7

That was only in the first part of the first year. But things got better afterwards till they reached a thousand-tentacled perfection. And there was a lot of educating going on at the school or schools. It was all high quality. It was a great success and a great pleasure. Yes education is, like sex, an ultimate thing, and nobody will ever speak or write the details of it. That would be an uneducated aberration. But education is one of the great and passionate things, and there can hardly be enough of it.

There were lots of encounters going on and about the schools, encounters between persons and groups of persons, between persons and events, between persons and surroundings, between persons and memories and premonitions and ideas. There were encounters between different areas of the same person. Duffey even had an encounter with some *soupe aux grenouilles* in France.

Melchisedech, once, just before he reached his thirteenth birthday, ate *soupe aux grenouilles* in France. He had ordered the soup in genuinely throaty and proper French and he had not disgraced himself in any way. This was at Colmar in Alsace. That was not properly in France at that time, and yet it was France. The chances are that he was staying at the Hotel du Champ de Mars at 2, Avenue de la Marna. He ate this soup at the Rotisserie Schillinger. He also ate *Tournedos au Poivre Vert*. He felt pleasant and worldly about the whole thing.

That's really all there is to the episode. Two elder persons whom he did not know were approaching him. He didn't know them because they hadn't been in any dipperful that he had dipped out of other minds or other environments. He could have dipped them up fresh at that moment and known them, but he didn't. And, since he accepted the fact that he didn't know these older persons, the scene faded and was gone.

Duffey, of course, had stolen this scene from the mind and memory of Sebastian Hilton. But it was a valid scene. He could savor every flick of salt in the *soupe aux grenouilles*. He could see and smell every grain of pepper on the peppercorns. The scene became a part of Duffey. It was an item in the Melchisedech memory forever.

Melchisedech gave a talisman to Charley Murray, and he gave one to Sebastian.

"But I will never have a son," Charley said.

"Nor I," Sebastian said. "But there is someone for each of us to give our talisman to, or Duff would not have given them to us. Art-in-life, like art-in-art, must be planned for a long time before it is born. And the most rational way, if one is a magician and a magus, is to give a talisman. I believe that one of these will work, Duffey, and one of them will half work. Murray's will work. But the one I give my talisman for will never be completely your man, or anybody's."

Sebastian Hilton met Duffey at dusk one evening outside the main gate of the school. It was the last day but one of their last year in school. The next morning they were to leave. But Sebastian was white and shaking, and his dark eyes had purgatorial gleams. And this was the boy who was not scared of anything,

"Melchisedech, they've found their way here," he said. "They came within a little of killing me. And if they had killed me, there would have been no one to prevent their killing you too. They've gone for double here. The only ones

they could be after are myself and yourself. We are their only possible prey, their only authentic targets. I have been absolutely careful. Have you?

"Have I what, Sebastian?" Duffey asked. But he knew. It was the three slack-mouthed and slanted-faced young men who were here. They were the ones who had haunted Duffey from his early childhood. Had they found this place because Duffey had somehow been careless?

Duffey saw them on the roof then. He hadn't seen them before, but he had sensed that they were here. The three saw Duffey, and they fastened their eyes on him and on Sebastian. They were still about two years older and two years larger than Melchisedech was, but likely they didn't age or grow in an ordinary way.

School friends were climbing up the walls after the menacing three. These friends were going fearlessly up the stippled bricks and castellated window corbels to catch the three slanty youths on the roof and deal with them. They had the schoolboy sense that the three were unmitigated enemies.

"*You* know who they are, don't you?" Sebastian asked with the sharp tone that implied that Melchisedech should know, though of course the other boys wouldn't.

"I suppose so," Duffey said. But he didn't, not the names for them, not in words. He would never know that. Duffey could have found out from Sebastian at that moment if he had asked. But he was too proud. "It's dangerous for the two of us to be together ever," Sebastian said. "They can use the two of us as a baseline and triangulate in on us. There are fewer than a hundred of us targets in the world, and two of us in one place will register too strongly on their receptors. We attract them too much, and they'd kill us both. I have been careful, and I know that you have been. But I knew that you were one. And you didn't know that I was. So you have not been as careful as I have. And yet we *will* be

together very much, however dangerous it is. The greater thing should never give in to the lesser."

The last of those slant-faces disappeared from the edge of the high roof. The face left an after-image of absolute malevolence and a promise of blood still to be spilled. Half a dozen of the schoolmates were up there on the roof then, and they should have surrounded the slant-faced youths somewhere in the steeps and valleys of the roof. The schoolmates hunted fearlessly. They knew out of their intuitions that the knife-wielding slant-faces could kill only those they were sent to kill.

"Well, they didn't find us for several years," Sebastian said. "They didn't find us till our last day but one at this school. Tomorrow we'll go from here. You know that they *won't* be caught on the roof though."

"I know it," Duffey said. But why wouldn't they be caught. The three sleazy youths couldn't be found on that twilight roof at all. And there was no way they could have gotten off of it.

Book Two: Late Boyhood of a Magus

“Then Melchisedech, the king of Salem, brought out bread and wine...”

Genesis 14:18

This is not leaving those earlier years forever. Neither those years nor the accounts of them are complete. Only a little bit of one of them and a hint of the other three have been given, but there was never any reason for these years to stand in strict sequence.

Melchisedech one day had the feeling of coming to himself in an obscure place where the clear way was lost. He was in a large city, on a street that bordered a green park, and he was burdened with a very heavy suitcase. He was without instructions, but this was his case:

Melchisedech had been told that everything had been done for him that could be expected. With all fine wishes and recommendations, he was on his own now. He had been given, in a final act of the hand-washing ceremony, one hundred dollars. This was quite a bit of money then. One could live on that for three or four months. It had also been pointed out to him that a willing worker could find a job without much trouble. This was true.

Melchisedech Duffey was fifteen years old and he had just finished a good high school education. He came to this crossroads of life a little earlier than did many boys. He had a big suitcase full of clothes and tools, and he had six hundred and fifty dollars in money (this included the hundred dollars given him by the well-wishing kindred). Melchisedech had been a good merchant during his boarding school days, and he had sold out all those businesses to a consortium of other boys.

It was the last day of May of the Year of the Lord 1915. It was on this day also that Melchisedech began to grow the first of his beards to make himself look older. He had an uncontrollable urge to travel, to go to one or another of his cities, to go to Chicago, to go to Boston, to go to New York. He began to snap his fingers, and golden sparks cascaded from them. This really happened. Melchisedech had the golden touch at his fullest then. A sturdy little girl saw it and ran over to him out of the park.

"How do you do it?" she asked. "I'm a fan of yours, you know."

"I'm magic," Duffey said, "but I haven't any fans." He snapped his fingers once more and made another shower of gold sparks. From this he knew that he would have good fortune in all his enterprises for a while.

"If I was magic I'd make a golden coin instead of golden sparks," the sturdy little girl said. "I think you need a manager. You *can* make coins, you know."

"I love a practical woman," Duffey said, and he kissed her. He snapped his fingers again, and a gold coin danced in the air and rang on the sidewalk. There is nothing that has so mellow a tone as a gold coin ringing its signature. "It's yours," Duffey said, and the little girl picked up the five dollar gold piece. "You are my luck, you are my love," Duffey said, and he kissed her again.

"Why don't you do it all the time if you can do it?" she asked.

"Because I forget that I can do it. I am always forgetting the wonderful things that I can do. It's nice to have one fan in the world."

"I'm Gretchen Sisler," the girl said. "I'm almost nine. My mother works in restaurants, but she's just been fired. We can live for a while on this though."

"I'm almost sixteen," Duffey grinned. "We will meet again, Gretchen."

"We certainly will," she agreed. "I'll see to that."

Duffey set out traveling, on foot, with his suitcase that weighed a hundred pounds. He went downtown. He could have taken a streetcar, but there were certain thoughts and speculations that he could only experience while walking. He walked around for half a day with that heavy suitcase. This was to give fortune a chance to arrange things for him, to shift the scenery where needed, and to marshal the prospects and strike the tone. He went into the Dublin and had cheese and black bread and beer. He had tricked himself out of his traveling urge by his long walking, so he had saved train fare. He needn't go anywhere. He was already there, in one of his half dozen cities. He was a very strong boy, but he was tired now.

One of the Dublin girls (she was named Evelyn London) came and sat with him. Oh, she was probably young. About ten years older than Duffey. What she really was was Duffey's second fan of that day, and both of them would be forever.

"You are my boy, you are my love, you are my prince," this Evelyn said as she played with Melchisedech's sorrel hair. "You are a gold star."

"Do you know anybody with a building to sell, Evelyn?" he asked her.

"The building just across the street and down a block," she said. "I will write down the name of the man who owns it, and where he is. And I will walk to it with you. It's just what you want. I knew you would come today to buy it."

The building was a large and rickety horse barn or livery stable, and it was empty. This was on Walnut Street downtown in St. Louis, Missouri.

"It's just what you want," Evelyn told him again. "It is big enough for you, and you can get it cheap. Oh you can get rich and glorious here, Melky! It will fit every one of your needs perfectly. To anyone else it looks like old horse manure there. It looks like that stable that Hercules had to clean. But for you it will be gold dust."

Duffey didn't quite know what his needs were. He was operating somewhere between impulse and intuition. The prospects were churning around in his head, but he couldn't see the answers yet.

"You are my boy, you are my love," Evelyn London said. She kissed him and left him for a while. And Duffey gazed at the horse barn, knowing that horse barns were not red hot items right then.

The decline in horses had already begun in deep downtown. The streetcars had contributed to the decline in horses, and now the automobiles were contributing to it. Oh, there were still twelve thousand horses for hire downtown, but once there had been eighteen thousand.

Duffey found the owner of the building. They made up a contract and a bill of sale and a deed. The price of the building was two thousand dollars. It was five hundred dollars now, and five hundred in six, twelve, and eighteen months. Melchisedech moved into the building by putting his suitcase on the slate-stone floor inside. He had a hundred and fifty dollars left after making the down payment, and there were people in St. Louis that he could have money from if he needed it. He wouldn't need it, but he wasn't friendless. Nobody who can snap his fingers and make gold sparks and golden coins shower out will ever be friendless.

Duffey got the gas turned on, and he bought twelve mantles for gas fixtures, three for the torch-like post lamps in the horse barn itself, nine for the nine ramshackle rooms that were upstairs. He bought himself a cigar and he smoked it till he let it go out. He went to a junk store to buy an iron bed with mattress. They were so cheap that he bought three of each. He bought a table and a gas cook stove, a gallon can of red paints, and a swivel stool. He had a drayman bring the things to the building.

There were several long loafers benches both outside and inside the building. Such benches were common around

livery stables. There were fifty-five stalls and mangers in the horse barn, and twelve carriage bays. There was a lot of lumber in all that. Melchisedech plumbed up the cook store. A small vise, a hack saw, and a pipe die were among the tools that weighted down his suitcase.

He went out and bought a five gallon jar of pigs feet, a five gallon jar of spiced Polish sausage, a five gallon jar of apple butter, ten pounds of cheese, ten loaves of black bread, a hundred pounds of potatoes, a dozen cups, a dozen glasses, a dozen plates, a gallon of whisky, five gallons of wine, a thirty gallon keg of beer. The same drayman brought these things to Duffey's place. Then Duffey painted a sign in red letters on a board he took from a horse stall. Paintbrush and turpentine were other things that he carried in his suitcase.

"Ten thousand items at reduced prices!" the sign read. "Food and lodging. Whisky, wine, and beer in convivial surroundings. Shaves, haircuts, and baths. Entertainment around the clock. A quality gentlemens' bar and club. Melchisedech Duffey Proprietor." It was a well-lettered sign. Duffey was perfect on lettering.

There was a cistern hand-pump that worked after a little priming. There were a few old buckets and pots and hand basins around. Duffey set potatoes to bake in the oven, and he set potato soup to simmer on top of the stove. There were old horse shoes and horse collars and various pieces of harness. There were two broken carriages that did not need to remain broken. There was probably five tons of livery stable junk around there. It couldn't be classified, it couldn't be described, but there were surely ten thousand items of it.

Melchisedech Duffey was a fifteen year old man with a good start on a red or sorrel beard. He had his own residence and his own store and establishment. He was in business, though he could not say for certain what business it was. He had his prime stock already bought, and he had a little more than sixty dollars left in his pocket.

A monster came in. He was the first customer, and he turned out to be a monster instead of a man. The monster might not have been much older than Melchisedech, or he might have been three thousand years old. But then so might Melchisedech have been three thousand years old. The monster was very dark and powerful, but he was put together carelessly. He wasn't completely ugly, but nobody else had ever looked like that. His shoes were serviceable though. They were very wide. Monsters have wider feet than do people. His pants and jacket were rough stuff in rivermans-blue, and they were sound.

"Do you need something, sir?" Duffey called ringingly, for this was his first customer in his establishment.

"Oh yes, I need so many things, so many!" the monster said.

"A shave and a haircut?"

"No, things like that don't do me any good."

"Something to eat and drink?"

"Yes. And a place to take a bath. And a place to sleep," the monster said.

Melchisedech give the monster coffee, whisky, cheese, bread with apple butter, Polish sausage, pigs feet, and a plate of baked potatoes. And, while the monster was eating and drinking, Duffey began to heat buckets of water on the cook stove. He had selected the biggest of the horse troughs (livery stables always had such large and sectioned water troughs), and he spread old horse blankets on the stones around it. He would get the city water turned on tomorrow. The cistern pump was helpful but it would not be sufficient. He would buy a gas heater tomorrow and install it. He would have hot and cold running water. But for now he pumped and heated bucket after bucket of water, and began to fill one of the big sections of the watering trough with it.

He set out his own white soap, almost a new bar of it, and a very big glob of the yellow, harness-and-horse soap that was already in the building. He put the cleanest of the horse

blankets on the best of the iron beds with the best of the mattresses.

The monster finished eating. He asked for more whisky, and Duffey gave him a full water glass of it. He asked for a cigar.

"All I have is a cigar that is half-smoked," Duffey said and he pulled it from his pocket.

"That will be fine," the monster said. He sipped whisky and smoked, and he seemed to find some peace there.

"I am Melchisedech Duffey and I would like to make your acquaintance."

"I'm Giulio," the monster said. "I work on the river boats sometimes. And other times I work on the ocean ships. Or on the docks. I don't know at what hour I will rise from my bed. How much is the count? I pay it all now."

"A dollar," Duffey said.

The monster paid Duffey a silver dollar. Then he went, taking whisky and cigar with him, to the watering trough where he took off his shoes and clothes. He dropped his clothes to the horse-blanketed floor, and he hung his brown scapulars on a peg on the wall there. He climbed into the warm water of the horse trough with a sigh of relief and pleasure.

Another man came in. He looked familiar. Oh, he was an Irishman. Duffey remembered the saying, "The Irish haven't handsome faces, but they have memorable faces: it's hard to forget one." This man had a memorable face, but whom was it remindful of?

"I intended to buy this building," the man said. "I was playing with that man who owned it. I didn't think there was another person in the city who was fool enough to pay eight hundred dollars for this building."

"Nah, man, man, be good," Duffey chided him. "There was no eight hundred dollar price. There was never anything except the two thousand dollar price. And we were the only

two persons in the city wise enough to see what an outstanding bargain it was. How can I serve you, sir?"

"Shave and a haircut," the man said. He was a humorously rough-looking man with beetling brows and a beetling belly. Young Duffey pulled up the swivel stool that he had bought that day, and he flapped a huge bib in the air in preparation for tying it around the man's neck.

"Haven't you a proper barber chair?"

"No. I'll get one soon," Duffey said.

"I have one," the man told him. "I'll bring it over tomorrow. I'm Bagby."

"I'm Melchisedech Duffey."

"There can't be too many of that name. I believe that I knew your father."

"I had none."

"Can you be sure that you hadn't? What is your entertainment around the clock?"

"Pitching horse shoes. And I also do magic."

"Magic tricks?"

"No. Real magic."

"Oh yes. I know who you are now. You don't have a pool table?"

"No, not yet. I'll get one soon perhaps."

"I have one. I'll bring it over tomorrow. Have you only three beds?"

Duffey was shearing the rough hair off of Bagby and turning him into a dude. Other people were in the doorways sizing up the place.

"Yes," Duffey said. "I'll get more beds as trade improves."

People had seen the sign, and the word had already gone out that a new man in the block was selling whisky in both nickel and dime shots. One of the loafer benches soon had eight drinking gentlemen of the shabby sort. They sipped very slowly, and they talked low and pleasantly. There would be no loneliness in the establishment from now on. Those men could sit there and drink almost forever.

"The man who last used this horse barn for a flop house, he didn't use beds at all," Bagby began to unflex his tongue for this new proprietor. But Duffey knew oil-of-the-tongue better than most boys of his age. This man was a loose one.

"What did he use?" Duffey asked.

"See those rafters running to the tops of the horse stalls from the front wall," Bagby pointed. "There are fifty-five of them. Calculate the length of them now. Would you not say that each of them was a ten-man rafter? Notice the several hooks hanging from some of them by leather thongs. See where the other hooks might have hung before they were taken down or lost. Allowing ten of them to a rafter, there would have been five hundred and fifty of those hooks dangling overhead."

"That's right," said Duffey, and he lathered Bagby. The monster had now got out of the horse trough bathtub. He had rolled his clothes and shoes into a pillow and had stretched out on the bed and pulled the clean horse blanket over him. This was for modesty, not for the cold.

"Now see those several padded leather straps in your junk pile," Bagby said to Duffey. "Be advised that there were once five hundred and fifty of them. Are they not padded nicely? There is no way that they could hurt anything with such fine padding. And have they not fine adjustable buckles? They would never creep. They would never slip. Simplicity is the answer. Do you understand how they were used, Duffey?"

Say, this man was a ruddy kidder! Well, what *were* those several padded leather straps for anyhow? They were some part of horse harness or rigging, but Duffey had harnessed lots of horses and he had never used any straps like that. He cut Bagby gently on the check with the razor just to keep the man from getting too far ahead of him.

"Oh sure," Duffey said as a hint of an answer was whispered to him by an ebony giant. "Right around a man's neck would one of them go. They are too well-padded to

give injury and too well buckled to slip. They wouldn't strangle a man all the way, but they'd insure that he slept deeply. Strap their necks into the straps and then hang the gentlemen up on hooks for the night. And five hundred and fifty men could be accommodated in this comparatively small area in that manner. What did he get for each one, Bagby? Is ten cents too much?"

"He got ten cents each per ordinary, but he never slept more than about two hundred a night at that."

"That isn't bad: twenty dollars a night almost clear. All, but then there were the Wednesday Night Specials! That was nickel night in the old horse barn: and I tell you, Duffey, there was always a sell-out. There was never an empty berth on Wednesday night. Ah, it was a beautiful sight to gaze at five hundred and fifty snoring gentlemen each hanging on his hook! And that nickel potato whisky that he sold them for each slumber was three cents profit a shot."

Duffey had finished shaving and haircutting Bagby. He untied the big bib and snapped and popped it like a pistol. "Twenty cents sir," he said briskly. Bagby paid promptly and in cash. How else can one make so much money so easily and so quickly?

Duffey picked up one of those padded leather straps and whacked it across the palm of his hand several times as he walked past the bemused drinkers on the loafers bench.

"Nay, boy, nay," they said. "It was a joke. It wasn't really that way."

Most of them knew Bagby, and they knew his jokes. But bemused drinkers always have the worry that such jokes might take a turn to their peril. One of those drinkers on the bench said that the leather straps went with Greely Pack Saddles. Pack horses and pack mules used to be rented out of the livery stable to people who wanted to pack into the hills and woods for a few days to get away from it all. And the former proprietor had provided Greely Pack Saddles

which were the best kind, the aristocrats of the field. He rented these to go with his pack horses and mules.

But another man said that the padded leather straps were what were called California Bucking Rolls, and that they could be put onto any saddle to make a horse-breaking saddle out of it.

Duffey had driven long steel stakes between the slab stones at two places in the room. Several men had then filled buckets with dirt and with fine old manure from the stable yard. They brought in the friable mixture to build up horseshoe pitching pits. And soon there was the clang of metal on metal.

"Have you a trade, Duffey?" Bagby asked.

"I have. I'm the best carpenter in St. Louis."

"No you're not. I am. But I need an assistant. My cabinet shop is in the building right next to this. There is a boarded-up door between the two, and it can be unboarded. You could put a big clang-for-service bell here and come back through the door whenever you had a customer. And you could be busy in my place whenever you weren't busy in your own. Or you could set up a twin of my own workbench here on your side and work on furniture and cabinets and such. I am the best joiner and cabinet man in St. Louis."

"No you're not. I am," Duffey grinned back at him. This Bagby wasn't a very old man for all his comic swagger and swank. Duffey had cut and shaved ten years off him and now he was a young dude. He was no more than five or six years older than Duffey, twenty or twenty-one or twenty-two years old. He did have a fine building and shop next door. What walls! What walls, what ceilings, what rafters! They were all of walnut. Both Bagby's and Duffey's buildings were built entirely of fine walnut wood.

"The buildings were built a hundred and twenty-five years ago," Bagby said. "This was a walnut grove before Walnut Street was laid out and named. All the buildings of

this block were built of the wood from that felled grove, but all except our two buildings have been replaced. A very little cleaning and polishing will wake up the hidden walnut splendor of your own walls and ceilings and stairways."

The afternoon was gone and evening come while Duffey had been busy establishing his business.

"You'll have to learn to delegate, Duffey," Bagby slid. "All men who are big in business have learned to delegate. There's no success without it. Pick out a likely man and hire him to tend your business for the night. Then we will go out and celebrate. Often, when a man does not take the time and effort to celebrate his success, God will believe that such a man does not deserve that success, and he will take that success away from him." Duffey picked out a man and gave him fifty cents to work the twelve hours till full dawn. The man said he would need a dozen beer mugs and some more whisky if he were to run the business properly through the night. Duffey went out and bought a dozen quality mugs for a dollar. He bought more whisky, and brought the purchases back to his establishment. He lit the three big gas torches: the torch at the front door, the torch at the back door which led to the old stable yard. (Duffey already saw that old stable yard as a beer garden and courtyard café and an open air market), and the big torch in the middle of the main area of the old horse barn.

And Duffey and Bagby went out to celebrate Duffey's success in business. They went to Meinkmueller's French Restaurant and had *zwiebelsuppe* and *rinderbraten* and all such things as one gets at the top French restaurants in St. Louis. Then walnuts and brandy and cigars.

They went to a burlesque show at the Star and Garter. Then they went to the Bavarian Club to drink and sing, where those strong laughing blonde girls, all in peasant costume, would give gentlemen rides on their backs. You had but to ask. Duffey made friends with one of them named Helen. They went to the Dublin where Evelyn London had

already spread the word about Duffey and his new place. Then back to that place.

Things were going nicely there, but the monster was roaring and asleep.

"He's a troubled creature," Bagby said. "I know him a bit. He works on the riverboats, and he comes around here about once a year."

Two other customers were sleeping in the other two iron beds, and a dozen were sleeping on horse blankets on the floor. Others were sleeping or half-sleeping on the loafers benches, all still holding drinks. But there were lively customers also, wining and dining and horseshoe pitching customers. They had set up two more horseshoe courses. Duffey's first night in the new business looked like a good one.

The monster rose from sleep still roaring. He flung on clothes and shoes as if pursued, and he came to Duffey. "Have you not something to give me?" asked this monster who was named Giulio, "something for one of my unborn sons that he be not as I have been?"

"Yes, yes, my creature, I give that thing right now," Duffey said. "It's so hard to recognize one of the right ones when he comes."

"I guess I am a little bit unlikely," monster Giulio said. Duffey got a talisman and gave it to him. The monster took it and bolted out into the night. He was a pursued person, and what sleep he had got at Duffey's he had stolen from his pursuers. But he would sleep no more that night.

Bagby whistled a curious tune after the monster. It was cruel and comical at once. It was bristly. It had the clatter of hooves in it, but they weren't horses' hooves.

"What is the tune?" Duffey asked him.

"I made it. I'm still making it," Bagby said. "I started it some months ago when your monster was last in the neighborhood. It's the *Gadarene Swine Song*. Your monster

is one of the Gadarene Swine, and he'll be pursued till he drowns himself in the water."

"No, I think he's a good man," Duffey said.

"Some of the Gadarenes are good, but their lineage is against them. But how did you know he was a person to give a talisman to? Is that how you have your luck so quickly, Duffey? Have you a talisman for this building also?"

"Yes, I have a talisman for this building. And I have giants for helpers." Bagby shuffled out into the night singing the Swine Song.

The monster is accursed by fate!
Hi ho!
The monster's saving comes too late.
Hi ho!
Perhaps fate changes yet, or worps.
Make hymns for him on golden horps
With rangle-tang of flats and shorps...
... You'll save him not," the death bird chorps,
He'll drown until he is a corpse.
Hi ho the gollie wol!

That was one of the numerous verses of the Gadarene Swine Song.

2

But while Melchisedech was establishing his business in one afternoon and night, it took him several weeks to stabilize it and institute it property. Even with invisible giants for helpers, it took him several weeks. But all went well for him, and he knew that he was in the years of luck that could never return. This King, this Melchisedech, had never known defeat. He already had the surety that he would not know either total nor eternal defeat. But he saw, by both pre-

vision and post-vision device, that he would suffer a few paralyzing catastrophes before he finally came to port, catastrophes such as ordinary people have no idea of. (Ordinary people have more grubby, and often more severe catastrophes.)

But now, as he came to his sixteenth birthday, it was all well. He owned the "Rounders' Club" ("For Gentlemen Rounders of the World"). This was, as the sign said "Restaurant, Bar, Resident Club, with Horse Carriages and Automobiles for Rent. Games on the Elegant Riverboat Deck. Tuxedos for hire. Rounders' String Band playing in the main dining room every night except Tuesday. Patrons become Automatic Members of the Famous Steeplechase Club. The House of Ten Thousand Duty-Free Bargains. Racquets. Whist. Poker. Horseshoes."

Lucille Sisler, the mother of young Gretchen, had gone to work for Duffey at Rounder's. People began to call Lucille Duffey's mother-in-law, though she was only twenty-eight years old and cute. But Gretchen had told everybody that Duffey belonged to her. And Olga Sanchez of the torchy shoulders had come to work there. Oh, Olga! Duffey brought horses back into the horse barn again. Yes, he brought horses into the great central room itself, into a divided-off part of it. Really elegant people do not mind the smell of truly superior horses while they dine. They were the most noble horses in town, with red and gold harnesses, and incredible carriages. The place grew to fast opulence. Duffey added import items and art items to his ten thousand bargains. He added whole groups of entertainments and elegances. But other things must go on while this was going on.

Duffey couldn't allow the summer to run away and leave him. He was already educated by most standards, but he was not yet up to Duffey standards. He enrolled for courses at several institutions and colleges and universities, for

there was not any one of them that was big enough to hold him by itself. In that summer of 1915, he took courses at St. Louis University from the familiar Jesuits, at Washington University, and at Concordia. He took classes at a school of pharmacy and at a school of music. He was busy. He totaled off the hours of his activity one day and found that it came to twenty-eight hours, without hours of sleep. But he knew tricks with time already.

For such sleep as he took, he slept on the wonderful streetcars. He rode them all over town to his various destinations, and he slept (though sometimes he read or studied instead) for several hours every day. He also had several sparky and elegant trolley car romances, for there is nothing like a streetcar for meeting girls. Early elegance was in the air for him that summer. For that summer, and fitfully for ever after.

Oh, time had to be found for other things! One evening a week was devoted to attending the Star and Garter. And Duffey also went to legitimate drama theatres. Then there was pugilism and the whole nimbus that surrounded it.

Bagby was a prize fighter and he fought about once a month. His success had slowed a little towards the end of summer when he had grown into the heavyweight class. They hit a lot harder among the heavyweights. But he was still one of the most promising young fighters of the city. And he knew that publicity, high and flamboyant publicity, was one of the names of boxing. Whether or not he could whip an opponent in the ring, Bagby could almost always whip that opponent in the newspapers before they came into the ring. He always composed ringing battle statements and sent them to those Heavenly Twins, the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* and the *St. Louis Globe*.

"How long has this been going on?" Duffey asked. "I could whip almost anyone the ring way, and I could absolutely whip anyone the newspaper way."

Bagby took Duffey to Hammerschmidt's Gymnasium and got a few of the canny managers and promoters to watch the boy as he worked out. Duffey was now a heavy middleweight and still growing. He had the large and powerful hands of a much bigger man. He had the telling shoulder slope that wise men always talk about when judging the fighting potential of a lad. Duffey had boxed in school and he was handy in the ring.

They scheduled Duffey for the third preliminary fight on the Monday Night bill. He would get nine dollars if he won, six dollars if he lost but made a good fight of it, and only three dollars if he lost miserably or was knocked out. It was a four rounder he fought and his opponent was Dandy Dan Dillard. Melchisedech put himself into a state of mind that would insure victory. He summoned invisible giants to aid him if he should need aid. He ransacked the distant mind and movements of his talented friend Sebastian Hilton who was so fast of foot and hand and heart, and he felt the high-speed moves and mentality come into him. He understood all the tricks of getting the jump on the other boy and drawing first blood. He rushed out at the clang of the bell for the first round.

And Dandy Dan began to give him an unmerciful beating.

Four rounds of that. It was the just equivalent of four hours of Hell itself. Once Duffey thought that he might have it all ended by one lucky stroke, but even the fastest feet and hands in the world weren't enough to finish it. Duffey called on every device, but Dandy Dan sent Duffey's invisible giants whimpering away like beaten puppies. Or like giggling goofs, it really seemed. Duffey thought "Strong Victory" , but he found it very hard to maintain any sort of thought with his head being hammered like that.

Then it was over with, and Duffey had gone the distance, though that last round seemed mercifully shortened. Duffey simply didn't understand how he had survived the thing. He was quite surprised to find then that he had won, that he

had taken the first three rounds by wide margins and was far ahead in the fourth. And that fourth round had been mercifully shortened. The fight had been stopped because Dandy Dan had been out on his feet and in danger of grave injury. Duffey was unmarked, and he had his breath back within seconds. The memory of the terrible beating that he thought he was getting faded away. Dandy Dan was a livid hulk, and Duffey was hooked forever on the high sport. He had rosin and alum in his blood now and henceforth, and he was scheduled for another fight the next Monday night.

Well, Duffey was hooked on it, but not on the fighting end. He could count a house, and he could figure. He would have a few more fights, but he already knew where the success was. Within six months, Duffey was promoting his own fight bills and doing well. Duffey discovered music late that summer, or possibly it was the summer after that one. Now he became a banjo man in a straw-hatted string band. Duffey had been studying musical theory in one of the schools, and notation and harmony and construction, and the history of all of them. And he played the piano. Everybody who took any of the courses in musical theory has to take some instrument at the same time.

In the *Rounders' String Band*, to which he was paying good money, Duffey had a banjo player from whom he wasn't getting optimum.

"Here, let me show you how it ought to be done," Duffey said once, and he took the banjo. It was the first time he had ever held a banjo. Duffey achieved a few extra effects on it, and then he gave it back to the man. But, a very little bit later, there was wide-open opportunity for other extra effects, and the man did not take that opportunity. He did not even know it was there.

"Here, let me have it," Duffey said. He took it and he kept it, and he played till evening. He played all the evenings thereafter unless he was busy with something else. And, whenever that was the case, one of the bemused drinking

men off the loafers' bench would play. Some of them were pretty good banjo players. And that first summer, or possibly it was the summer after that, the *Rounders' String Band* received an award for being the third best string band in the city. Playing the banjo was one of the things that Melchisedech continued for the rest of his life. He realized from the first the correlation between wearing one of those flat straw hats and playing the banjo. Can you imagine a person playing a banjo while wearing some other kind of head covering? Can you imagine a person playing a banjo while bare-headed?

Can you imagine gloomy music-picking from a banjo? From a mandolin, yes. From a guitar, yes. Almost all guitar music is gloomy. But no note of gloom can ever be picked from a banjo.

Ah, the songs and tunes that the *Rounders' String Band* used to play. "Rock Island Rag" , "Cincinnati Zoo Rag" , "Missouri Valley Shuffle" , "Gadarene Swine Song" (that was adapted from a tune that Bagby used to whistle and sing), "Whistle Stop Jump" , "Morgan County Fair Strut" , "The King Shall Ride" , "Show Boat Shuffle" , "Honeysuckle Hop" , "River Road" , "Gloria! Gloria!" , "Sawdust Trail Drag" , "Startime Trolley Car" . Those were the sweet old songs, and no other string band in town played them all.

"The King Shall Ride" became Duffey's instant favorite one night when Duffey became the King and he did ride. Olga Sanchez took him up on her torchy shoulders for a ride all around the big main room. And thereafter, whenever that tune was played, she took him on her shoulders to ride, or else Lucille Sisler took him on hers. Duffey was King to these two. They were very intense partisans of his.

Charley Murray, the old friend, lived there in St. Louis. He lived in the west end and attended St. Louis University as a day student. He was not in any of Duffey's classes, but the two saw a lot of each other. About once a week, Charley

would come downtown to the Rounders' Club and perform some of his magic tricks. Duffey knew that he was a better magic man than was Charley, and with real magic, not with tricks, but wild horses tearing him apart would not get him to let Charley know that. Besides, he didn't yet have such an entertaining patter as Charley had.

Wild horses! Duffey had now, in his head, achieved the ultimate in a magic act. The magician is torn apart literally by eight wild horses, and his torn-off limbs and gurgling trunk are offered to all for examination. And, a little later, many of the non-essential difficulties being worked out, the magician will appear whole and unsundered again.

Duffey didn't know know the trick could be effected by even real magic. But one of the magic trick books said that any trick that could be conceived of could be performed, whether by trumpery or illusion or trick prop or whatever. It was certainly a challenge. Duffey still ponders this trick sometimes. He'll figure a way to do it yet. Charley Murray came up with a sum of money and became half owner of Rounders' Club. This would give Duffey freedom to travel to other places and to other metiers, and it would bring intelligent direction to the next stage of growth. Duffey was better at originating things and getting them going than he was at carrying them to their higher stages. And as soon as Charley was out of college, Duffey would be able to take up really serious wandering without leaving ventures behind him to fall to ruin.

That autumn, or anyhow one of those autumns in one of those years, Duffey added attendance at art school to his other activities. It may have been at this time that he dropped his classes at the school of pharmacy. No one can do everything.

Duffey was good at all crafts. There was no better carpenter or machinist to be found. Now he came quickly to all the art techniques. He learned to draw in pencil and ink

and dry brush and charcoal. He learned the crayons and pastels. He took to oil paint like a ducklings to pond water. As a rock sculptor, he was a natural. He had cast metals before. Now he became an excellent caster of bronze statuary.

He was good at everything. He excelled at everything. But there is something that comes after excellence. It can't be named, but one will know it when he meets it. And Duffey wasn't meeting it very often in his own work. He ordered his invisible giants to assist him with their hands. He could not feel their hands, and he ordered them still more loudly.

"We are here, we are here," they answered, but he could hardly tell where the answers were coming from. These art giants were of a different and more exterior sort than other giants that he called up. He followed their voices to various places. And, in each case, he did find the thing that comes after excellence. It was always there with them, and he could always touch it. But it was something that had already been done by other hands than his.

So Duffey knew that he must always be more of an art dealer than an artist. He would be an artist for the love of it, but only a few times in his life would he touch in his own work that something that is beyond excellence. But he knew it when he saw it.

Bagby said that Duffey cheated on himself though. He had divined that there was much more money in being an art dealer than in being an artist, and he had suppressed his slim money proclivities.

Duffey won seven of his first nine fights in those his palmy days as a fighter. He was pretty good and he worked up to where he was making as much as a hundred dollars a fight. But here also he would be a better dealer than an artist.

Duffey sometimes saw his sister, if she were indeed his sister, there in St. Louis. It is almost certain that she was his step-sister and had always been. At these new encounters she was a flaming stranger to him. Yet he had already, some years before this, absorbed her personality and the continuing flow of her memories and her life. That being so, it seemed that her person itself should be somehow superfluous to him. Duffey told her that she was superfluous, and she laughed. She was two years older than he was, and she tried to deal with him as if he were still a child. But not even this new flame-top, false kindred could deal with Melchisedech as if he were a child.

She was a likeable person. Duffey knew that she was very much like himself, and he counted this as totally in her favor. She was his own anima made animate. She was the flame-red part of his own soul. She had fire-red hair, redder than his own. She had fire-blue eyes that were his exactly. He could see out of them without distortion. With all other eyes that Duffey looked out of during his personality ransacking, there was distortion. She gave the impression of body strength beyond her size, and she wasn't small. She had the very large and strong hands and the swinging shoulders of Duffey himself. And she had a strong touch of the bovine. This might be counted against some persons. It couldn't be counted against this Mary Louise. This was the royal bovine, this was the sacred cow that all chthonic goddesses become and are and pass through at some stage of their story.

Mary Louise was intelligent and proud and friendly. She was very ghostly; yes, that was the word. She was much in the manner of an apparition.

"What if she is the prime and she has made me superfluous?" Duffey worried in one of his flashes. You'd

shiver to behold her every time, and there would be awe and fear as well as delight at her appearance. One does not meet one's own personality pieces without some trepidation.

Duffey's sister now bore the name of Mary Louise Byrne. She had been given the surname of the kindred or pretended kindred who raised her. Duffey now loved her with a suddenness that scared him. He realized that she was the near perfect person, and at the same time he realized that she was a fit portion of himself. She was himself without the abysses. And no, she should never have been exteriorized. But that direction of thought ran into a vortex. If none of the parts of him should be exteriorized, then there wouldn't be any world. Everything in the world was to some extent a part of Melchisedech.

"If this be arrogance, let it be so," he said resolutely. He made jolly and kidding and hilarious love to Mary Louise much of the time, but sometimes...

"I will have to get me a handmaid," Mary Louise said. "I think it's cheating, but the sisterly wives of the patriarchs always had handmaids for the diversion of their consorts."

"We are a royal family," Melchisedech said, "and besides that, I have never been sure that you were my real sister. The Kings of Egypt had their sisters to wife, and I'm not sure that the Kings of Judah did not. Should not the King of Salem have his? There's a love between us that is a plain outrage, but should it be bridled?"

"It should be, yes. It will be. Oh, Melky, stop that! I will get me a handmaid."

Mary Louise had a close girl friend that she decided to bestow on Duffey. But could Mary Louise be trusted? And could any handmaid of hers be trusted? The almost perfect Mary Louise had slanted humor, and the handmaid was sure to echo it. This handmaid was Elizabeth Keegan. At first meeting Beth Keegan came into Duffey's room ahead of Mary Louise. She came with arms wide open and she gave Duffey a large kiss.

"I love him. I'll keep him," she said to Mary Louise as that royal sister entered. This Keegan girl was so handsome that one felt she had to be kidding. Nobody could be that pretty. It had to be a joke. It was, of course.

Beth had the blackest hair ever, and the lightest ivory skin. No one could be built as she was. It was architecturally impossible. It was a beautiful burlesque, a pleasant fraud. Even the ideas of such a form can only be found in cartoons, or dug up from under five thousand years of soil deposit in some illicit part of the world. But time stopped when she came. All the observation of her took place in a fragment of an instant.

She was small. She had child's feet. But there was more than full contour to her calves and thighs. The waist of the girl was so small that it seemed unsafe for her to be walking about, but her hips were ample and her breasts were superb. Her neck and shoulders and arms passed belief. "How did the ancients make them so?" one wanted to ask. But Beth wasn't an ancient. Duffey discovered that he was looking at her as at a work of art. He also realized that he had been more excited by works of art than he had ever been by live people, a situation that was perhaps temporary with him.

Duffey had to know something. He put his hands upon her. She was cold to the touch. He had to know something else. He put all his weight on her. She scarcely swayed. She was unbreakable. She was a piece of ivory statuary. She was not real. She would always have this elegant coldness of body and strength of grained ivory, for all of her clowning and her torrid behavior.

No one could be dressed as Beth was. Duffey found out later, about three minutes later, that she was wearing a costume for a play she was in. But she had made it herself, and nobody else could have filled it that way. And what passion was the voice of Beth Keegan when she cried out:

"Oh my love, my prince, my boy, be with me forever!" Real passion, yes. But there was a strong touch of something

else. And then, at that first meeting between the dumbfounded Duffey and the confounding Keegan, Beth broke up into total laughter and was joined by Mary Louise. Beth Keegan didn't really have any such passion voice as that. She didn't have any such walk as that. (Her walk had seemed to be a thing that hadn't happened in thirty centuries, not since the fall of Tarshish: her walk was unfair enticement.) And she almost didn't look like that.

Her shattering beauty was only something that she put on for a lark, as though it were a funny hat. The voice and walk were put-ons. They were among the things that she was practicing for the school play. But if she had really been like that, and no put-on, then she would have been one of the great ones of the ages. She would have been the great love of Duffey's life, if he could have won her. And if he could not have won her, she would have been the great lost love of his life.

Somebody (herself and a consortium of friends) had contrived the whole of her. Someone had made her up. Almost the only words that she ever said were lines taken out of plays, but she had her own superbness. "If only she were real flesh and blood," Duffey said sometimes. "If only she were real ivory," he said other times. She flustered Duffey so much that he would never get over it. She scared him. The stories of living statues are all really ghost stories.

Duffey would play it brash and showy with her sometimes, and then he would fall into confusion again. He, a man of the world, was confounded by this little figurine that somebody had created for fun, and perhaps he became her final creator. But what to do with her when she was created?

Often Duffey would kiss her or fumble with her or sit on her lap because he didn't know what to say to her. And what he did say was always trivial stuff, and he would flush hotly at the shallowness of it as soon as it was out. He was afraid to be alone with her, he a successful businessman and a

practitioner of all the arts. And this was a big joke with Beth herself and with Mary Louise.

"She is solid ivory," Mary Louise would say. "Why are you afraid of an ivory doll?"

"She is solid artifact, yes," Duffey answered.

"Think how many billiard balls you could cut me up into," Beth said. "You could be rich, honey. And I cut so easily."

But when they were gone that time, Duffey said a curious thing.

"If only she weren't alive! If only she weren't alive she would be worth a million and a half dollars." His art-dealing eye was appraising her correctly as a life-sized ivory statuette. Sometimes Duffey with another young man, Charley Murray, or Edward Ranwick of the art school, or Philip Manford of the school of music, would pick up Mary Louise and Beth at the little college they attended and take them for rides or to dinner and theatre. They would go in one of Duffey's own rigs, a carriage or a buggy. Or sometimes they would go in Philip Manford's overland automobile.

There was real pride in being with such handsome girls. Mary Louise was large and red-headed and of a sandy serenity, and she was lightly freckled. And Elizabeth Keegan was small and statuesque, and she was all ivory and midnight in her coloration. Oh, they did make an animated tableau when they swung around the town!

They would dine at Meinkmueller's French Restaurant. Or at Duffey's own Rounders' Club "Golden Buffet" , or at his small "Bread and Wine Room" . For class combined with rowdiness, there was nothing like Rounders in all St. Louis. Or they would eat at Schotts, or at Kelly's Steak House. Then they would go to the Roxie or the Music Hall or the Broadway Theatre or the Star and Garter. Beth and Mary Louise would often go up on the stage at the Star and Garter and mix in the skits. Piccone, the little Italian who ran the S & G, said

that he would give them both jobs there any time. He had known Beth and her family forever.

"I will do my thesis in innovative stagecraft at the Star and Garter," Beth told him in her stagey voice.

"Just walk like that, just talk like that, just look like that," Piccone would say. "You yourself are innovation enough."

Later the party might go to the Bavarian Club to drink and sing. Oh, those chubby, breasty, costumed, Germanish blonde girls at the Bavarian Club. Duffey was very good friends with one of them, Helen Platner.

"Like brewery horses!" Edward Ranwick used to laugh at the sturdy girls at the Bavarian. Aw, that wasn't true. They were powerful but trim young girls, not like brewery horses at all. This Edward Ranwick had already made quite a name for himself at the art school, but his art didn't impress art expert Duffey. It was "skinny art", as Duffey called it, and there were things lacking in it.

Or they might go to the Dublin where Evelyn London would chide Duffey for leaving her for this new girl Beth.

"Oh my love, my prince, my boy," Evelyn would say. "You have left me for this little figurine who isn't even real flesh. She is Dresden China. She is crockery. Come back to me, love."

Evelyn and Beth used to take each other off, and both did good imitations. They achieved a sort of blending of styles.

The party would often go back to Schott's or Kelly's late. Those places had fine music bars that adjoined their restaurants. And sometimes they would go back to Duffey's own Rounders' Club which was really the most entertaining place in town. Where else could one pitch horseshoes in a music bar? Where else did they have live horses and circuses in the divided-off part of the main dining room? Where else did they have a flea market with ten thousand import-free bargains in an old stable yard? Where else was there an Olga Sanchez with her torchy shoulders. She mixed drinks at the main bar.

And sometimes they would gather in Duffey's own rich walnut rooms upstairs and lie on the sofas and on the floor before the old fireplace.

But once Duffey came on Beth, alone and crying. She was never alone, and it would be impossible that she would cry.

"It's that bird," she said. "Hear what it sings? 'The year is almost over with.' That's what."

"What bird, Beth?"

"Don't you know anything? The catbird, the one that didn't go south. It's in a draft corner of your own fireplace chimney here."

"I use a calendar myself. Yes, I know that the year is almost over with. What is that to thee and to me?"

"It means that my youth has fled," Beth sniffled. "There's no way to slow things down."

"I know a hundred ways to slow time down," Duffey told her, "and I'll show some of them to you. But, Beth, you're only seventeen."

"I will be eighteen in another month, and you will still be sixteen. I think you cheat at it somehow. It's going, Melky, it's going, it's almost gone."

Beth Keegan had made the most horrifying of discoveries, that it isn't going to last forever.

"We haven't had much 'family' together, Melky," Mary Louise said once, "and we should have. I *am* your sister, in some respect anyhow. Oh sure, I am your passionate consort also, and yet we hardly know each other. There is, of course, that other life in which you know me completely, but we will keep that below the threshold. I insist that we have these party evenings together for the sake of the 'family' that we comprise. And they are fun. We all love each other. I love Beth, and also all the boy and girl friends who make up our set. And if Beth will not love you, I will pull all her hair out. And if you will not love her, then I will kill you and strew your limbs for the buzzards to play with. She is the prettiest

girl I can find or make and the most exciting. Make love to her more, romp on her more, kiss her more.” Well, the Keegan loved to be kissed and romped on and ridden on. But it was all joke-romps and joke-rides and joke-kisses. And it wasn't true that everything that Beth said was lines out of a play. A lot of it was lines out of comic magazines.

“This is my telephone operator's kiss,” she would say. “Smooch, smooch, smooch, your three minutes are up, please.” Or...

“This is my watermelon-eater's kiss,” and she'd give slurping kisses overflowing with sweet juice to Duffey, and then break up in laughter. Beth could never help laughing when she was being kissed. It ruined some kisses but it improved others. Or she would say “This is my schoolteacher's role. We're going to get this right if it takes all night.”

Or she might call out “Pony Express” and bend her statuesque back to be ridden. Duffey liked to ride her. But Beth was not real. She was a piece of ivory statuary that laughed. She was Etruscan, she was Cretan with all that three-thousand-year-old color and freshness. The living statue is one of the archetypes of the deep universal unconscious. It is one of the primordial dreams, and so was Beth Keegan. Duffey modeled one of his talismans on Beth. It was already authentic and lightning-struck. Now it would be Beth Keegan-struck, for she carried it with her for six months. To whom would Duffey give that one?

The slightly changing group of young people held together in season and out of season, swimming in the summertime and sledding in the winter, touring and celebrating at all seasons. All of these young people (there were other girls, Dorothy Tarkington, Mary Marinoni, and there were other fellows) were delighted with each other. They were young — it is easy to forget just how young — and talented. Some of them were successful far beyond their

years. And they all saw each other, correctly, as brighter than life.

“Now that the April of your youth adorns...” as the poet said.

Sometimes it seemed as though Bagby were a part of Duffey's person, a part of his grosser future person. A few people in the Rounders' Club neighborhood on Walnut Street had always believed that Bagby and Duffey were brothers, and there was no persuading them out of it. And Duffey's sister Mary Louise was already acquainted with Bagby before Duffey ever created the Rounders' Club. How, in a city as large as St. Louis, could such different kinds of people as Mary Louise and Bagby, living in such different parts of town, maintaining such different kinds of lives, have become acquainted?

This was something that neither of them would ever tell Duffey. And just how well had they been acquainted? “But I know everyone just as you know everyone, Melky,” Mary Louise said once. “I'm as royal as you are, and I also have my attributes and talismans. Mine cannot bring about the creation of persons as easily as yours can, but mine can bring about the coincidence of persons and things. Do you believe that it was an accident that you met the old horse barn and that you met Bagby? And I *can* create. Who do you think it was who made Beth Keegan? But don't you know that Bagby is a part of our own person? Oh, there are some gross ones who share it with us!” How would Bagby and Duffey be taken for brothers? They didn't look alike. Bagby was black of hair and whiskers and swarthy of skin. Duffey was russet-haired and red-bearded and freckled and blue-eyed. Both were a little broad for their height, but Bagby was a bit the bigger man. Oh, they both had oversized hands and swinging shoulders; they both had that swagger stride. They both had that voice that was strong and of good range, clear and high sometimes, bulky and broad often;

theirs were muscular voices if you want to call them that. Duffey could invade and ransack the mind of Bagby as he could that of everyone he encountered. But often he had the feeling that Bagby was growling in the Duffey mind, and that Bagby held at least a faintly scribbled permit to be there.

Well, there were whole shanty notions in Bagby, that's what it was. The Bagby mind couldn't be despoiled in quick raids as could most other minds. One couldn't carry that loot away in the hands or in a suitcase. It would take drays, it would take trucks, it would take box cars and whole trains, it would take barges and flat-boats, it would take ships to haul away the Bagby mind-freight. It was mostly shanty stuff, but it was of immense bulk.

How could Bagby have devoured and become possessed of this living population, this extensiveness of whole nations, in his short years? He wasn't eternal nor extensible. He didn't even have the thin golden dust of touched-eternity that Duffey and Mary Louise had, that Sebastian Hilton and others had. How could he have known the interiors of eighty thousand houses in St. Louis itself. Oh, Duffey had free entry into the big and shabby warehouses of Bagby's mind, but he hadn't the means of hauling the material away. He hadn't the depots to store it in. He had magic methods of handling materials, but here was a bulk that defied his magic.

Bagby was a baroque, a flawed pearl. The pearly sickness was all over him. He was a friend and a sort of business associate of Melchisedech Duffey. He was a person of surpassing depth and scope. But he was a slob. He frequented the fleshpots of Chestnut Street, and he brawled in every section of town. There is always room in the world for a royal brawler, but Bagby missed the royalty by a bit. He had a bad name in many places.

Art critic Duffey said that Bagby's St. Louis was a series of Doré drawings. All views of the physical world are the subjective views of somebody, and Duffey could watch even

the subjective views of Bagby and others. He loved these ink drawings that made up the Bagby City, those black and white and gray sketches (due to technical difficulties there were no colors in Bagby's mind), and he loved the Bagby-esque shape of the people and the town.

Bagby's battling had sometimes been of a murderous and evil sort. There are men who love to battle even to death. In that era, there was a sort of shanty dueling ground by the river, on a lone patch of sandy clay under the bluffs and edged in by a sand bog. There were vicious bare-hand and rough-shod fights there, fights for the sake of fighting, and to finish. Bagby had once left a man for dead in such a fight. And Bagby had once been left for dead himself.

"It's those three slanted-faced men that he brawls with the most," Mary Louise told Duffey once.

"Oh my God!" Duffey said.

Bagby had violent ideas on politics and economics and religion. He believed that all the parishes in the city, including the cathedral parish, had lost their orthodoxy. He believed that most of the pastors and all the assistants were a bunch of Judas Priests. He went to mass at St. Malachy's clear across town, this being the church that came nearest to preserving the true faith.

Bagby was a mess. If he were indeed a part of Duffey, then perhaps it was best that that part was externalized and that it could be segregated.

Mary Louise liked Bagby pretty well in spite of all this. She ran around with him a little bit. She said that he was usually right in his opinions, but that he was so rock-headedly right that he defeated himself.

"Oh really, I wouldn't mind Bagby so much," she said once, "if only he didn't work so hard at being Bagby."

And Bagby was to Duffey, and to Mary Louise also, a sullen and magnificent piece of shanty, monochrome art.

And then there was the ballooning. Duffey joined (according to one version, he founded it) The World-Wide Argonauts Argo Balloon Club. This was a club of very rich sportsmen, and the entry fee paid to join the club was three thousand dollars. Well, Duffey had three thousand dollars and quite a bit more of loose money at that time, but he may not have paid it for his membership. Bagby said years later (and Bagby was the only one who could remember the balloon adventures in detail in later years) that Duffey did not pay anything at all for his membership, that he rather collected three thousand dollars from each one of twenty three sportsmen, he acting as North American Bursar of the World-Wide Argonauts Argo Balloon Club. Duffey was supposed to transmit this money to the World Headquarters at Geneva. So he would have done, but the World Headquarters at Geneva did not then exist and would not ever exist. So Duffey was stuck with the money.

Duffey paid twice three thousand dollars for a custom-made balloon, and that was more money then than it has ever been since. It was a large silk-bag balloon. It ran on hydrogen gas and sand bags. The great silk-bag would be inflated with hydrogen, and at about the same time four thousand pounds weight would be loaded into the basket or gondola. With this balance, the balloon would rise resolutely but not too swiftly as soon as it was uncabled from its mooring. Part of this weight always consisted of hundred-pound sand bags, and part of it was people and supplies for them. Duffey would sometimes take as many as nine or ten persons up on an ascension. With them and with water and food for them, that would be more than two thousand pounds of the four thousand pounds ballast.

The balloon would descend when Duffey would let part of the hydrogen out of the bag. It ascended again when Duffey threw some of the sand bags out; or, in extreme case, when he threw some of the people out. It went, generally, where the wind went. Duffey did have a sort of tacking sail rigged up by which, in theory, he could depart from the direction of the wind somewhat. In practice though, that tacking sail merely made the wind angry, and it would tear the sail to pieces and then blow the balloon where it had intended to blow it originally. And Duffey also installed a gasoline engine and a propeller, but it would influence the balloon only about five miles an hour. But Duffey, and Bagby even more, learned to select winds by ascending and descending and by controlled drift. They learned to see the different winds, to know their speeds and strengths and directions. They learned to sidle into them.

Duffey first named his magnificent balloon "The Argo Twelve" for a reason that he was not able to explain to any of his companions. Then a misty person of great power and status came to him and told him that the Argo Twelve was currently active, that he Duffey should have known that it was, and that Duffey would not be able to use the name Argo Twelve for his balloon. But this person told him that the balloon might sometimes be used as a pinnacle or ship's boat for the Argo of the Twelfth Voyage. Duffey thereupon changed the name of his balloon to "The Argo Twelve and Half", a name still harder to explain than the original name.

Duffey used to ascend with Bagby, with Mary Louise, with Charley Murray, with Beth Keegan, with Dorothy Tarkington, with other friends and acquaintances and employees, with young Gretchen Sisler, with Papa Piccone, with Evelyn London. At first they would go up only in the sunny daytime. They had not yet settled on proper lighting for "Argo Twelve and a Half". Duffey was all for electric lights to be powered by well-cell electric batteries. Charley Murray thought they should use kerosene lights or compressed gas lights. Bagby

was in favor of carbide lights or lime lights. Duffey finally won when he showed them reports on other balloonists.

Other balloonist sportmen had been blown to Kingdom Come when using non-electric lights on their balloons. Balloon descent involved releasing large amounts of hydrogen gas right out of the bottom of the balloon sack, right into and around the balloon gondola.

Duffey and his friends would go about two miles high and would fly as much as two hundred miles on the long days; and they had good luck at coming back to their starting point. They were lucky in leaving such a starting point. The prevailing westerlies blew above St. Louis, and the Gulf southerlies blew there; and local 'river winds' were generated by the Mississippi itself, by the Missouri River that spilled into it from the west a little above the town, by the Ohio River that merged with it from the east a few miles below the town. St. Louis was not the windiest city in the country (though it was one of the five windiest), but it had the best *selection* of winds of any town in the country.

There is just no touring like touring in a balloon. It is open, it is fresh, but it isn't unpleasantly windy: you go generally at the same speed as the wind goes. It is cloud cruising. Sometimes it is storm cruising. It was the highest and most classy sporting activity that had ever been.

Beth Keegan proposed a balloon dinner party. She insisted on it, and it was brought about. There were four couples of them at the dinner party, and a serving man to wait on tables. There were Duffey and Beth, Mary Louise and Bagby, Charley Murray and a girl named Monica, and Cyrus and Edith Summerfield. The serving man was off one of the loafers' benches at the Rounders' Club, but he looked splendid in livery; and he had served elegant persons before, counts, earls, a duchess, barons, even the late Duke of Kent. The Summerfields were members of St. Louis high

society as well as commentators on that same high society in both the *Globe* and the *Post Dispatch*. They were a young couple full of glitter; Edith was a sort of cousin of Beth Keegan, and they responded readily to the invitation to attend a formal dinner party in the gondola of a balloon two miles high.

A little modification of the gondola was necessary for it to carry an eight-place table, and another bulky object, but the modification was made. The supper itself was catered from Duffey's own kitchen at the Rounders' to the balloon at ascension time. Then they dined high in the sky, in candle-lit splendor, as the late-ish darkness settled first on the earth below them and then above to enfold them on high. Listen, that was only part of it! Another thing they had with them in the gondola was a player piano. The serving man pumped it after he had served dinner to them. And Beth herself pumped it when it was time for the serving man to serve the after-dinner wine. It was all excellent Rag Time on the player piano.

"The next time we have formal dinner up here, we will have a small but sufficient dance floor installed," Beth said. That part, somehow, never came to pass. Even so, we ask you, did you yourself ever dine in conditions of such unusual elegance? And Cyrus and Edith Summerfield would give it elegant treatment in the press.

Duffey, however, was a little bit worried about their candle-lit splendor when it came time to descend. He put the roll "Black Midnight Rag" into the player piano, blew out the candles, accidentally knocked Charley Murray's cigar overboard, and opened the gate valve to let the hydrogen gas whoof out and the balloon came down.

That was not the last time they went up in the wonderful balloon, but it was the most memorable time.

In later years, when Duffey had left St. Louis and Bagby was the custodian of the balloon, Bagby several times wrote to

Duffey that ghosts had inflated the balloon and taken it up for nonscheduled voyages.

"It is all right," Duffey would write back. "I know who they are."

5

So things went for some months (most of two years anyhow) after Duffey had exploded into enterprises and affairs in St. Louis. And then it ended.

What ended? Oh, only the world. The world that we have now isn't the same is the world that we had then. Or it may have been only the multitudinous, golden-touch world of Melchisedech-in-St.-Louis that ended.

"I'm Freudian now," Beth Keegan announced one evening. "All of us superior persons have become Freudians. I want superior dreams from all of you right now. Mary Louise, you stuffy sister of the King, do you dream?"

"I dream passionately about every one of you here, though Melky says that my passions are bovine," Mary Louise said. "My dreams are superior, and all of you here are in them, and I'll not reveal them."

"Charley," Beth said to the Murray, "tell me one of your dreams. You are my second love. You are my second passion and pride. Please do not disappoint me. Come up with something good."

"No I won't," Charley Murray said. "You have no business analyzing my dreams, since they are mostly about you. Sometimes you are a pea-hen, sometimes you are a talking statue, sometimes you are a bicycle. I won't tell you my dreams. I won't be uncovered before you."

"Melchisedech, my king and my concupiscence, tell me a dream."

“Yes. Here's the just-before-morning dream of today. I was in my own person as the Boy King or Boy Magician. I was making birds, which isn't difficult if you're a Boy Magician. I was making them out of clay and setting them in the sun to dry. Then I would transmute them to the color of living gold and I'd set them to flying. Other colors would come to them as they rose in the air. They were brilliant Paradise Birds. Then someone began to shoot them down.

“I called the royal game warden to stop the depredations. He notched an arrow to his bow-string and came along with me to kill anyone who was transgressing against the bird law. And we found the transgressors immediately.

“ ‘They are killing Birds of Paradise,’ I said. ‘Explain to them that it's against the law to kill them.’ ‘It's against the bird law,’ the game warden told one of the rough men who were shooting the birds down. ‘They're Birds of Paradise.’ ‘ ‘Birds of Paradise, my slanted face!’ one of the rough men cried. ‘These are clay pigeons and I can prove it. Here! Look what's raining down from the sky from the last ones we shot!’

He was right. It was clay. My birds had turned from Birds of Paradise into clay pigeons, and clay pigeons were always in season. The game warden shot the rough men and killed them, but he wasn't happy about it. ‘I don't care whether you are the king,’ he told me. ‘You call me out on one more clay pigeon chase and you're going to get shot with my next arrows.’ ”

“Oh, that's an easy dream,” Beth said. “It means that you're beginning to doubt your own powers and your own creations. Yes, I know that you do make people, and you put some pretty fine features on them. But you have to make them out of clay. There's nothing else to make them out of. What really happens is that you collect people like you collect pictures or statues. Then why will it shock you when some of your brightest people turn out to be forgeries? But

that wasn't your main dream for last night. Tell me the real one now, since you tried dishonestly to hide it."

"There was a big division in my central dream of last night," Duffey said then, "and I believe that it will prove to be a watershed of my life. It was at first a conventional apocalyptical dream. A pythoness voice was giving explanation of it in a running narration as it went along; and I believe that it was you, Beth Keegan, who were taking the pythoness role..."

"A chasm opened up and began to undercut all the tall structures and all the towns also. I went down into the chasm to halt this attrition, for it was eating up everything. Multitudes of people were falling into the hole, and especially children and young people. 'It's lucky that I'm on the spot here,' I said. 'For this requires deep magic.' But I found that my magic was paralyzed. I was helpless and I could not find any bottom to the chasm. But I was able to cross the bottomless ditch to the other side. I'm on this other side now, and the rest of you are on the other side where you were, and there's a veil between us."

"I called on my giants to impose a stasis on the chasm and prevent its spreading. I called for giant's hands to come and perform prodigies. They came, but they were severed hands, lopped off bloodily at the forearms, and with their strength dead. They were joined together with manacles."

"Then I saw that they weren't giant's hands at all. They were a pair of little boy's mittens, and the manacles that fastened them together were only the drawstring of the mittens. Then I heard a voice (and it was your own exaggerated voice practicing for the pythoness role, Beth) 'These are the years that the cows have eaten'. That is it, Beth. Do you know what it means?"

"Of course. When are you going away, Melchisedech, tonight or in the morning?"

"I didn't know that I was going away. Does the dream say that I will?"

"Of course. You can't impose a stasis on a chasm from here."

"Then you will have to take over the Rounders' Club, Charley," Duffey said.

"All right. When will you be back, Melchisedech?"

"When will I be back, Beth?" Melchisedech asked her.

"In seven years, I suppose. That's a common period. And the 'years that the cows have eaten' are almost certainly the seven sheaves of grain. Will you be all right for seven years? I can't wait for you, you know. I love you a lot, but not for seven years' absence. No, no, not me to wait for seven years."

"Will I get my magic back after the seven years, Beth? Will I be able to command the hands again?"

"I think so. But you haven't lost much of your magic. Only a part of it." They went to Meinkmuellers for a good supper, and both friends and strangers came to Duffey and said that they had heard that he was going away. But Duffey hadn't told anybody; nobody had told anybody.

At Meinkmuellers, Charley Murray and the rest of them were joined by the two Monicas, Monica Drexel who was sometimes Charley's girl, and Monica Murray who was Charley's sister. Both of them said that they had come there because they wanted to see Melchisedech for the last time. And yet nobody had told them that Duffey was going away, and nobody had told them that the group was going to Meinkmuellers for supper.

It was there that Melchisedech gave a talisman to one of the Monicas, to the wrong one at first, apparently. He was confused by these two since they were named alike and ran around together and looked alike.

"I don't know what this thing is," said the Monica to whom Duffey first gave the talisman. "I don't understand it at all. I never saw anything like that before."

"Oh, I think it's for me," the other Monica said. "I think I know what it is. Thank you, Duffey."

The bunch of them went to the Star and Garter after that, and the skits there seemed to be better than usual. Duffey was called up onto the stage, and the proprietor Papa Piccone announced that their good friend was going away on a seven year assignment. Some of the burlesque girls came out and kissed Duffey.

The bunch of them went to Schotts and to Kelly's and to the Bavarian Club. Everybody told Duffey that he would be missed, and he was treated like a king everywhere.

They went to the Dublin. All the men shook Duffey's hand there and all the women kissed him. They said that they would miss him, but they knew that it was a grand opportunity he was accepting, secret though the details were; and then it's a great thing just to travel and see the world. But neither Duffey nor Beth nor any of them had told that he was going away. Really, none of them except Beth believed it yet.

"You are my boy, you are my love," Evelyn London said, "and you are going away."

When it was quite late, they went back to Duffey's own Rounders' Club, and the string band began to play "The King Shall Ride". Olga Sanchez took Duffey through all the rooms of the club, and out into the streets, and into the club again. Many people gathered to see Melchisedech in his club then, musicians and artists and dealers, politicians and monsignori and parish priests, show people and club people, bookish people. A dozen of Duffey's ladies came in, Francis O'Brien and Mary Marinoni, that slim Chinese girl Angela Ching, Gretchen Sisler and Gabriella O'Conner who were young grade-school girls, Dorothy Tarkington, Helen Platner from the Bavarian Club, two of the girl acrobats from the Star and Garter. They all kissed Duffey goodbye.

And the men came in to shake his hand and wish him well, almost everyone who had ever sat on the loafers' benches, Bagby and his shanty sort, straight businessmen of the neighborhood, priests and Levites, young men from the

different colleges in town, prize fighters and newspaper guys. There were a lot of drinks around till very late, and a lot of singing.

6

There were those, mostly from among Melchisedech's pretended kindred, who said that the St. Louis adventures could not have happened, that there was no room in the years of his life for those adventures. The only unaccountable years, they said, were the seven hidden years that came later; and it was agreed by everybody that Duffey was not in St. Louis (not for any conspicuous time anyhow) during the hidden years. But the Duffey-St.-Louis adventures had to have happened.

"It's a little bit dreamy," Beth Keegan would say in later years, "but I surely knew him then. I knew him later, of course, and I know him now. But yes, I remember him in those earlier years also. Those are like years separated off from others and put away in a box somewhere. But they are still there when you get the box down and open it."

"Of course I remember him then," Mary Louise said years later. "*He is my brother.* But those were royal years, and they will not be remembered completely about him by non-royal persons. They happened; it all happened; but I can understand why the 'relatives' don't believe that they happened. They have, to them, clear evidence that Melchisedech was still in high school in Omaha in the years 1915 and 1916."

"There are certain unholy persons or beings who want it to be that these things never happened," Bagby said. "Sometimes I don't understand the workings of unholy minds. Sure, he was here for right at two years. I remember him every day of that time. He happened. Those times

happened. This is the business that started here. It is still thriving."

And there are old men still sitting on the same loafers' benches who remember it all and can verify it. But there are un-royal persons who still maintain that there were no years when those things could have happened, that Duffey could not have been a thriving businessman in St. Louis at age of sixteen. He was still in boarding school in either Omaha or Kansas City at that age.

Oh well, back to the night of the great leave-taking and to the next morning. Well, how was it the next morning?

Oh, Duffey was gone in the morning, of course, and he was gone for seven years. There were a few second-hand rumors picked up as to his whereabouts, but nothing more. He had disappeared. But, from his own point of view, he couldn't have disappeared, could he?

Do not be so sure of that. Apparently the later Duffey either did not know or did not want to know where he had been in those years. There was something the matter with his own point of view. For him, there was some change made in earth and sky. He had gone out of normal places.

In another codicil of the circular log of the Melchisedech voyages, this is given: "There had been one very early morning in Melchisedech's youth, in his fifth or sixth youth really, when Melchisedech had walked out on the river shore in St. Louis, just below the Eads Bridge, and had walked right onto a low-lying boat; and it had been the Ship Argo in disguise.

"Melchisedech had then traveled in that ship for seven years, but not all of them in consecutive time. There was much time out for land adventures. The land adventures do not count in the Seven Lost Years. Neither are they deducted from the years of the life."

Well, there are many entries in the logs of the Ship Argo that have to be taken with a pinch of iodine. Beth Keegan

had visions of a boy killed by a boar. Oh, there was mythological basis for such a death, and many things are hoary in mythology before they happen in fact. But, with Beth, it may have been the case of not knowing where her own mythology began and ended.

There is precedent, of course, for losing seven years out of a life, or for having seven years hidden. There are a number of persons with seven hidden or dark years in their lives: Caesar and Diocletian, Boëthus and Carl the Great, Wellington and Lincoln and Sam Houston. George Barrow had a seven year hiatus, and Hans Schultz would have such an hiatus a few years after this time. Inconvincing details can be invented to fill the holes in every one of those lives.

And inconvincing details are invented to fill the hole in Duffey's life. Some of those details were invented by Duffey himself, and some of them were invented by other people.

Was Duffey ever in the war? Was he ever in the army in World War One? He later said that he had been. And he also said that, before he was old enough to get into the A.E.F., he had been an ambulance driver in Italy with Hemingway and in France with E. E. Cummings. He said that he returned to the United States from France, and then went overseas again, with the army in 1917. He may have been in a New England army camp very briefly in 1917, but even this is doubtful. Of course, everything that Duffey claimed as happening to him did happen to somebody with whom he was in accord. That is nearly the same as it happening to him.

Duffey's young friend Sebastian Hilton was an ambulance driver in France and in Italy in those early years. And he was the companion of high-ranking persons, in spite of his youth. Duffey may have lifted these scenes from Sebastian's mind where he always had entrée. But they were valid scenes, and Duffey lived to the full every scene that he ever lifted from anybody.

And yet there were several persons of repute who said that they had seen Duffey in Belgium and France and Italy in those years. "He was with an international organization named ARGO," one person said. "It was a little bit like the Red Cross. He worked off a ship that — well, I don't know exactly what they did. I thought that everybody would remember about the ARGO group, but hardly anybody seems to recall it now."

And so it may have been with seven years full of scenes, some lifted, some stolen, all vivid, covering those years three-fold and four-fold deep. (There wasn't room in seven years nor in seventy for all the scenes that Duffey assigned to them.) Some of them had been genuine Duffey scenes, but not all. But he made them all his own. And part of this mystery may not have been so mysterious as that. "Duffey, my beloved brother, is near as phoney as I am myself," Bagby once said about the interval. "If he can't remember those times, it's because he doesn't want to remember them. If he recalls them in wrong form, it's because there was a different wrong form about the originals. If he won't say what he was doing, maybe he was doing something he shouldn't have been doing."

Eleven of the prime creations of Duffey, eleven of the twelve human persons that he made, were conceived and born during those seven hidden years. Had Duffey something further to provide to the talismanic clay? Was his presence in various places a series of necessities?

Part of the mystery of the years will be raveled out later, but only a minor part of it. And no human person, not even Duffey himself, will know the whole of that interval until the afternoon of judgment day.

After seven years, Duffey came back. It was in the year 1923 that he reappeared. He didn't come to St. Louis at first, but the St. Louis people began to hear from him again. He was wandering around the other cities of his old territory, Dubuque and Sioux City and Omaha and Kansas City. He would visit some of his pretended kindred for a week or two, and then he would not be seen for several months. It was said that he had money, but he was in an unsettled state.

He came to St. Louis finally. He found that his sister Mary Louise had married. Who would believe it? She was married to Bagby! That was a little bit like a goddess being married to an earthling or a mortal. That was exactly what it was.

"Bagby is my dark object, he is my uncleansed stables, he is the lower part of me," Duffey said, "and I sincerely love the shanty freak. But what's this about him being married to my sister?"

Duffey found that his old girl Beth Keegan was married. And Charley Murray had done well for himself as well as for Duffey at the Rounders' Club. No, Duffey didn't want to take an active role in the club again, Duffey said, not just yet.

"My love, my boy my prince, you are back!" Olga Sanchez of the torchy shoulders said. She still worked at the Rounders' Club. She was now married to a beautiful Mexican man who had become high chef of the Rounders' Club Main Dining Room. "But, my love, you are not quite all back," Olga said to Duffey.

Duffey stayed with Mary Louise and Bagby while he was in St. Louis.

"Where were you really, Melky?" Mary Louise asked him. "I get only murky glimpses of it. It seems to be a valley you were in."

"I think it was the 'Valley of Lost Boyhood'," he said.

"Ah well, you kept yours longer than most do. What are you listening for, Melky?"

"For wings, I think, Mary Louise."

“And what kind of wings are they?”

“I'm not sure, Mary Louise. Not quite butterfly wings. I'm not sure at all.”

Duffey went to visit Beth Keegan and her family. She was now Beth Erlenbaum. Oh come on, Beth, you had to get a name like that out of a play. You had to get a husband like that out of a play. Indeed, Beth was now in plays, of a sort. She really worked at the Star and Garter now. She wrote many of the skits that Piccone put on, and she played comic roles in some of them.

Duffey still loved her, and she still loved him almost as much as she used to. And she still flustered him unaccountably. She had her husband and two daughters, and they did not know what to make of Melchisedech. Beth said that she had a recent goddaughter who would understand him though. This was the infant of Piccone at the Star and Garter. But Duffey did not meet that infant for another twenty-three years.

Duffey did not, at this time or ever, realize that Beth, though a little bit on the pretty side, was quite an ordinary person. He wouldn't have believed it even if it were explained to him. “What are you listening for, Duff, my prince, my love?” Beth asked him just as Mary Louise had asked him.

“Wings, I think, Beth.”

“And what kind of wings?”

“Moth wings, it seems. Can one hear moth wings for three hundred or four hundred miles?”

“Oh sure. I do it all the time.”

Book Three

Hog Butcher & Gadarene Swine

Tu Melchisedech secundum
Surgens nimis nunc jucundum
Deus tam dilexit mundum

Henri Salvatore, *Archipelago*

Giovanni A. Solli (Finnegan) had been born June 1, 1919 in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Vincent J. Stranahan had been born April 5, 1921 in St. Louis, Missouri.

Henry Francis Salvatore was born December 8, 1920 in Morgan City, Louisiana.

Kasmir W. Szymansky (Casey) was born October 7, 1921 in Chicago, Illinois.

John Gottfried Schultz (Hans) was born January 2, 1915 at St. Gallen, Wisconsin.

What had these persons in common? How was it destined, even before they were born, that they should be companions? And then there were these:

Absalom Stein

Dotty Yekouris

Teresa Piccone

Mary Virginia Schaeffer

Mary Catherine Carruthers

Marie Monaghan.

These latter six were born in approximately the same years as the first five, in Chicago, in New Orleans, in St. Louis, in Galveston, in Chicago again, and in Sydney Australia. Yes, all this information is pertinent.

Eleven of them named there. In all, there should be twelve in that canon, but there is some dispute over who the twelfth one was.

How are things done in this world and in other worlds like it? Does God indeed create and effect through demiurges and giants and magi and such creatures? Yes, from one point of view that is what happens. And from a dozen other points of view it may appear that a dozen different things happen.

The complete truth of it is many dimensions beyond us, and yet every one of these different points of view may be authentic. From one of the dozen, or the billion points of view, demiurges and giants and magi do indeed create and effect. Not one of these viewpoints, not even the extravagant magi-creators view, may be subtracted from the world affair. The world would not be authentic without it.

Yes, Melchisedech Duffey was a Magus. And, yes, he created people. We will come back to this subject many times.

After the missing years, after his reappearance, Duffey had been around his circuit of midwest cities for a year or more. He started three separate businesses, and he sold them one after the other when he got them going. He made money out of every deal, but there was something that he missed getting from the deals. He had become an entertaining and interesting man, and he was still a good man. He had the savor of a man who had retained virtue, by however chancy a margin.

But he still had the air of a man listening intently for something that was just over the edge.

It was in Omaha, in the year 1925, that Duffey felt a powerful directional urge and call. Someone was requiring or compelling his presence over a distance of four or five hundred miles. It was urgent. It was a moth call, and it had plenty of flame to it. It was the moth wings that he had been

listening to for many months, and now he had the direction and distance of them.

Duffey took a night train to Chicago. He sat in a day coach all night, when he was not wandering up and down the aisles of the train. He had only a suitcase with him. He had left his trunks and heavier possessions to be sent to him from various towns when he should finally find a destination. He had a quart bottle of good Canadian in his coat pocket and another one in his suitcase, for the dry years were on the country then.

A chubby little girl in the day coach kept flirting with him. But Duffey was looking at the mother of the little girl. "I wonder whether she knows that she has a terminal illness?" he asked himself. "A very, very terminal illness. I wonder what it is?" Duffey had these scrappy intuitions sometimes, and they were always correct as far as they went.

Still and all, the little girl was more interesting than her mother, in spite of the death mystery on the mother.

"My daughter is so awful," said the mother of the little girl. "I just don't know what to do with her. What can anybody do with a little girl who loves the men so much?"

"They can sit down and play cards with me," the little girl said. She was playing some kind of solitaire: Duffey sat down and began to play two-handed cards with her. She said that her name was Charlotte Mullens and that she was nine years old. That flirty little girl knew how to handle cards, and she knew how to handle men. She played footsie and kneesie and kissie with Duffey while they played cards.

"I don't know what to do with my little daughter," the mother said. "She is so forward." These two suddenly reminded Duffey of Gretchen Sister and her mother Lucille in St. Louis. Gretchen manipulated her mother into going to work for Duffey. She manipulated her into having dates with Duffey: but they always ended with Duffey and Gretchen carrying on together on the old Sisler living room sofa. The little girl Charlotte was the manipulator here, and her

mother was her puppet. So Duffey and Charlotte played cards and they kissed for games. And no nine year old girl kisses like that.

Mrs. Mullens had big quantities of lunch with her, and the three of them ate between hands. She had paper cups and they drank Duffey's good Canadian whisky out of them and got mellow. The mother was a little bit sparing of it, but Charlotte was into it like an old toper.

"I am in love with you, Charlotte," Duffey said, and he kissed her specially.

"Do you always fall in love with nine year old girls?" Mrs. Mullens asked.

"Always," Duffey said, "and sometimes with their mothers." He kissed Mrs. Mullens and she seemed pleased enough with it, but she just hadn't the style of Charlotte in these things. After a while, they played some sort of three-handed cards with kisses for stakes.

"It's more fun when you play for something," Mrs. Mullens said. Mrs. Mullens had a certain brisk way with the cards. Duffey was glad that they were not playing for money. Mrs. Mullens (well, her name was Gloria) had a certain brisk way of kissing also: friendly and full of value her kisses were, but brisk nevertheless. Kissing her was like biting into an apple, cool and juicy and flavorsome. Yes, but Charlotte had her beat.

"We're completely destitute," Gloria Mullens said as if she were reciting a lesson. "Our husband and father died two months ago and he seems to have left nothing but debts. He was always a fast man with the buck. He was a grasshopper; he was a butterfly; but he had to have left something, he handled so much money. He never ran out of tricks. I'm still not sure that his dying wasn't a trick. I expect him to come in grinning one day with his hands full of money and him crowing about the way he took those insurance folks."

A youngish man who had been popping around the coach for a long while now approached as if to join their party. Nine

year old Charlotte turned him aside with an imperious gesture, but surely the Mullenses knew the man.

"He also has the terminal illness," Duffey told himself. "Strange, strange."

"But I found that my husband had borrowed double and even triple on what insurance he had," Gloria Mullens was continuing. "And the insurance is attached where I can't touch it. He had borrowed double on the house and on everything. There are more debts of his turning up every day. I'll never clear them all. And I found that I had co-signed with him on a dozen notes, things that I had never paid any attention to at the time. They attached my salary where I worked, so Charlotte and I are skipping. Aren't you kissing Charlotte more than that last score called for? I still think that my good man left a stash of money somewhere and that he is trying to tell me where it is. His voice comes to me, but faintly. I am a psychic, but nobody is psychic as to his own closest affairs."

"Are you a professional psychic, Gloria?" Melchisedech asked.

"Yes, sometimes. You also are a psychic, as I divine, Mr. Duffey, and you may be able to help us. We're running blind and we're about broke. I'll have to get a job in Chicago for a while, and I'm not even sure that that's where the stash is. My man used to take a lot of quick trips to Chicago. He would get stuff off the boats and bring it to Omaha and other places. Oh, we both love him so and we miss him so much, terribly! But how can you backtrack on a butterfly?"

"I don't quite know," Duffey said. "Me, I'm on the trail of a moth."

They played another hand of cards, and Duffey kissed Charlotte quite a bit. She was no little girl. She was something else.

"What kind of moth?" Charlotte asked him.

"Oh, I believe that it is the *tinea evocata*, the evoking moth," Duffey said, "or it is the *indagatio*, the seeking moth."

Or maybe it will happen to be the *tinea letitia*, the joyful moth."

"Sum etiam erudita ipse," Charlotte said, and Duffey's suspicions were confirmed that this creature wasn't a little girl at all. "I'm educated myself" , she had said, and she hadn't got that way in nine years. And now and then she set her little girl's voice aside, especially when she whispered to Duffey, and used a woman's voice. "We'll find her for you, Duffey," she said now. "Evoking moths are always female, and we'll find her for you."

"She misses her father so much," Gloria said. "He had red whiskers too. I believe that she has fastened on you as a father image."

"Father image, my eye!" Charlotte scoffed. "Duffey is my sweetheart."

"How old are you really, Charlotte?" Duffey asked her. "Sometimes you don't talk quite like a nine year old girl."

"Sometimes I get damned tired of talking like a nine year old girl," she said. "You told Gloria that you were Melchisedech and that you had never had any father or mother. Well, I have my mystery and paradox too. I am older than my father and I am older than my mother, and that is as much as I will tell you. Possibly I am old enough to have been your mother, Duffey. I'm precocious about things like that, having sons and such."

"How old *are* you, Charlotte?"

"Oh, thirty-eight. That isn't really very old. And, as Gloria says, what can anybody do with a little girl who loves the men so much."

"What's Gloria?"

"My sister. That's usually the part I give to the other woman, after it's found out that she isn't my mother."

"And the man who was about to join us when you gestured him off?"

"He's my son. But by the time he came by accident to take a fourth hand at cards, I had come to like you and

didn't want to fleece you."

"Do the bunch of you live by playing cards?"

"Oh no, but it helps. We make a lot from it, but we make a lot from everything. There really is a stash in Chicago though. All the psychics we know are on the other side now. He's hired them against us. We need a good psychic, a mind-prober, to find the stash for us. We're too close to do it ourselves, though I'm a strong psychic. Duffey, find this butterfly nest for us, and we'll find your moth for you. I *can* find her for you, Duffey."

A little later in the night, Duffey taught Charlotte and her mother the Gadarene Swine Song. They sang it resoundingly, and Charlotte was particularly apt at inventing verses for it. She was smart. Some of the people in the day coach were trying to sleep and they protested the loud singing. But the Mullenses, and Duffey under the influence of Charlotte Mullens, were rude and just didn't care whether they kept those people awake or not.

2

In Chicago, Duffey said that he was going to a little north-side hotel that he knew.

"That's as good a place as any," Charlotte said. "If they look for us in our old haunts, maybe they won't be finding us in a north-side hideaway." Charlotte and her sister Gloria and her son Manolo went with Duffey in a taxi to the little north-side hotel. It was bright morning.

Duffey did several things that day while he listened to the sound of wings that were close. He was not a total stranger to Chicago. He had surely been there several times for a week or more. Once he had spent a Christmas vacation there in the rich home of Sebastian Hilton. Once he had lived

there for a month or so with false kindred who shucked him off to other false kindred when they found out just how unsettling a boy he was. Several times he had been there looking into business deals, possibly in the hidden years, certainly in the subsequent years.

He went to see Gabriel Szymansky who was a businessman who lacked the personality to get along with the public. Gabriel had two shops back to back, with a foot passage under the alley between them. The shops faced on two different streets. On the rich street, Gabriel was an antique dealer. On the poor street he was a pawnbroker. This man Gabriel had made big sums of money, but he always used associates to maintain the confidence of the public. There was never a more honest nor a more upright man than Gabriel, but the public can never accept an absolutely honest man as really honest. There is nothing in the absolutely honest man that the public can relate to. The public insists on an open man who is at least one-third rogue and one-third blow-mouth. Duffey could always force himself to be such a person.

About six months previously, Duffey had talked to this man Szymansky about coming into business with him and adding a book store and an art store. Duffey had also talked to Szymansky about six years previously, apparently during the hidden years, and he had given him a talisman. Six months ago, Duffey had hesitated on the deal of going into business with the man. Now he wanted it.

"I'll start today, Gabriel," Duffey said. "I can throw in the first ten thousand today and the second half of it within six months." Duffey could have thrown it all in that day, but he liked double-jointed deals. "I will take the full six rooms over the back shop, and I will be available day and night. I myself will move in tomorrow, and my wife will move in within a week."

"Duffey, I didn't know that you had a wife."

"I haven't. But within a week, I will have. She is a wonderful woman, I am sure of that. And ours will be a long and steady life together."

"Is she a Chicago girl?"

"She presently resides in Chicago."

They closed the deal. Duffey didn't have any wife, and he had no idea whom he would marry. He hadn't seen her. He had no notion what she was like. He only felt an overriding compulsion to find her somewhere nearby. For that, he had been called to Chicago over the miles.

"What is she like, Duffey?" Gabriel asked. "What are her outstanding qualities?"

"Fire and finesse," Duffey said. And he left Szymansky satisfied with what he had done so far.

There was a girl living in Chicago, Lily Koch, who had used to be the girl merchant at the school near Duffey's own school. Duffey phoned for her, and he was told by a pleasantly haunting voice that she was not in, but that she would get in contact with him, or he could call again, or they would both call, or anyhow they would get together, God willing. Duffey loved that pleasantly haunting voice on the phone.

He called for Sebastian Hilton who still maintained one of his several residences in Chicago. Sebastian was not in, but he would be at his club at one o'clock the following day. Yes, he would absolutely be there, though at present he was out of town. Yes, he would surely see Melchisedech Duffey there. Mr. Duffey was on the list of people who Mr. Hilton would always see. It was quite a short list, the voice said.

Out and about, a little girl was skipping circles around him on the sidewalk with a skipping rope. No, he was wrong. It wasn't a little girl. It was Charlotte Mullens.

"Are you finding the butterfly nest for me, Duffey?" she asked him, and they went over and sat on a bench where one waited for streetcars.

"Yes, yes, my little creature, we will find this thing for you right away," Duffey said, and he popped his hands together.

"About your creatures, my dear," Charlotte said. "Oh yes, I know about your creatures. They are almost the most interesting things that I find in your mind. I make creatures also, or figures, but I use a different process. Your figures, your creatures, dear, you need lessons in stagecraft. Your people, while you are making them, are static. You have not put them into motion at all."

"They are quite young," Duffey said.

"It's getting time that you devised scenes and scenarios for them. I will help you with it in a few years if we are both still around. The world has too many static people now. Do not add to them. My own, while they are often short-lived, are always quite kinetic."

"What do you use, Charlotte?" Duffey asked her. "I already had the idea that your sister and your son were projections of you, that they were ventriloquist's figures that you had made, or that they were mere lumps of your aura. Are they?"

"Oh, I use flesh and blood people, Duffey, but I select rather empty and pliable ones, usually actors. Then I do make them into compliant figures yes, and I do make them into lumps of my own aura. But there is nothing beyond nature in my creations. Is there in yours?"

"I don't know," Duffey said. "Well, I'm having more luck at finding the butterfly's nest than at finding the moth. The stash doesn't belong to you, Charlotte, but it did not belong to the man who put it there either. That man is away in durance, but he expected the stash to be inviolable in his absence."

"That man is coming out of durance today or tomorrow," Charlotte said. "That is what makes it so edgy."

"I want to know his name, Charlotte. I can't psyche this unless I know his name."

"Aga Gonof is his name, and his son is Orestes Gonof. He has boats. He brings liquor from Canada to Chicago and Detroit and Cleveland. I had a husband who was involved with him, and part of the stash does belong to me, a small part of it, Duffey, but you don't need the details. I'll take the other ninety-five percent for interest on the five percent that's been withheld from me."

"Does Gonof know what you look like?"

"No. Nobody knows what I look like. He called me the 'Disembodied Brain', so I have heard. I used to play the role of my own daughter. But even as my own daughter, I'd have to be quite a bit older and larger now than I was whenever he might possibly have seen me. And I'm still the same age and size. Work on it, darling. You won't have to tell me what you find. It will all be open to me. But I love to talk to you at every opportunity."

That little girl skipped away with her skipping rope.

Well, there was a key to unlock the box where the stash was, and Duffey got (from what mind he did not know) a figure replica of the key. Duffey knew about keys. He had made keys and matched them. And keys can be number coded for their reproduction. Duffey was able to write down the base or stock number of that key just by looking at it with his inner eye. And he was able to write down the several cluster numbers that define the modification of that basic stock, the little notches and kerfs and dips. It was a typical safety deposit box key, if only he knew the number and location of the box. That was the crux, of course. Boxes can be strong-opened without keys, but they can't be found without data to go on.

"And the location and number of the box will come to me," Duffey said.

"Of course it will," Charlotte told him. She wasn't physically present just then, but that didn't prevent them from communicating. "And I'll be right there when it comes

to you. But you missed your moth for today. We'll have to get her early in the morning, I believe."

"Where?"

"Not more than two blocks from our hotel. She is at a place very early in the mornings, and then she goes somewhere else. We got to town too late for her this morning. We'll catch her tomorrow sure. There is no moth that can escape Charlotte and Melchisedech. I'll go get the key made now."

It was easy, since they were in accord and since they were both full of powers, to talk to each other out of presence. Except that Charlotte had such a fund of pleasure and carnality accompanying her presence.

3

Very late that night, after Duffey had gone to bed in his hotel room, Charlotte visited him there. Whether this visit was in the body or out of it is not certain, but most likely it was an out-of-the-body interlude.

Duffey had been juggling the names and numbers while he slept and woke and slept again. He was in a wasteland. The sky and soil were much different from those of ordinary earth. They were more in the conditions that had prevailed in the seven-year land, during the dark years or the lost years.

It was a shore, but the ocean at that place was empty. There were bales on a dock, but they could not be loaded until a ship could find water to come by. A stevedore and his two brothers were guarding the bales, but they were nervous and pacing as if they had something else on their minds. They made sudden decisions. They left the bales abruptly and strode rapidly to the place where the wheels of three

gate valves came out of the ground. And that is where they made their mistake.

Duffey was onto those bales as soon as the stevedores had gone a little distance. He broke several of the bales open and let them scatter. They were bales of numbers and letters, and Duffey fumbled feverishly into their bulk for the right numbers and letters.

The stevedores turned the three gate valves that came out of the ground. This turned on the ocean and harbor and let the water flow in and fill things up. A ship on the other side of a hill or promontory blew its whistle as a signal that it was coming for the bales. Then the three slant-faced stevedores turned back toward their bales and saw that they had been broken open. The foremost of them came at Duffey murderously with a boat hook to kill him. "These will have to do," Duffey cried as he backed off with a handful of numbers and letters that he had selected. "The right ones have to be among these, or all is lost." The three Mullens people were there together then, though Charlotte had been there all the time.

"Stop the one with the hook!" little Charlotte Mullens cried out. "Gloria, Manolo my son, divert him, throw him down, stop him even if he kills you! Here, give me those, Duffey!" Charlotte swept the numbers and letters into her hands and arranged them like a hand of cards. "Perfect," she cried then, "absolutely perfect. This will tell me everything I need to know. Split, Duffey! Split, everybody! But divert him for a moment, Gloria and Manolo, and watch out for the other two. Maybe they won't really use the hooks on you. Oh, it spells it all out, and numbers it all out so perfectly: the bank building, the deposit box number, everything! Wonderful! Aw, ugh! It always sickens me to hear a boat hook crunch a skull like that."

"Will you be all right, Charlotte?" Duffey cried in a fleeting moment, knowing that they had to get away, knowing that Gloria and Manolo were already dead.

"Oh sure. I know how to go to ground, Duff," little girl Charlotte said. "In Chicago, I always take refuge in St. Angela Orba Orphanage. All but two of the sisters there think that I'm a little girl. And those two who know what I am, they will always provide me with commitment papers and love. You and your moth come out sometime and adopt me if you want to."

Duffey was running through Dead Man's Meadow then. It was a notorious stretch of seven-year land. But he felt the anguish of the three slanted-faced stevedores behind him. The ship was already at the dock for their bales. But some of the bales had been broken open, and some of them had blood on them.

Duffey's phone rang then. He was in bed in his hotel room. It was Charlotte who was phoning. "Get up, Duffey," she was singing. "We go moth hunting in just five minutes. Who'd have thought that moths got up so early, but I know where she is now. You have located the butterfly's nest for me and have given me the key to it, and you have given me its location and number just now. So I will find your moth for you."

"Ah, Charlotte, I was just dreaming about—"

"Dreaming my nine year old fanny! Don't you know the difference between a dream and a psychosomatic trance? We used to use the trances a lot when we did our mentalist acts. They almost always worked. And yours worked, Duffey! Why, all I needed was the name of the bank and the number of the safety deposit box. Box? It's a walk-in, isn't it? I'll make the pick-up today. I'm worried about those stevedores with the boat hooks though. They're killers."

"How did you enter my dream literally?"

"I told you that it was a psychosomatic trance, not a dream. I opened the door and walked into it, of course. This isn't getting you up and dressed. I'll be at your door in two minutes." She hung up.

But she was at his door in half a minute and into his room.

"Does it always take you that long to put your pants on?" she asked. "Your moth will be at that little stone church just two blocks from here north. I want to go to confession before mass. It's an even flip whether I'll get murdered on the swipe I'm on today, and I want to be prepared for death. On come on! You don't need to wash this morning. Lots of people don't wash anymore. It's kind of out."

"What do nine year old con women have to confess?" Duffey asked. He was tickled over the affair.

"Oh, robbing widows and orphans, things like that," Charlotte said. "Whenever I get a likely gentleman, I ask him whether he's a widow or an orphan. If he is, I go easy on him. I fleece him, of course, but I leave a few tufts. But sometimes we get greedy. And then I always have a lot of carnality to confess; and there's a few of our badger games that go over the line. Mama Gloria will have a gentleman in at night, and I will come out of the bathroom toweling myself in the buff. "Oh my little girl, she never remembers," Gloria says. "She is so artless. She is so guileless. She comes out of her bath at night just as natural as that. You'd think that a nine year old girl would begin to be aware of things." And the man is very heated and he doesn't know why. Then he fondles me, and Gloria goes out of the room for a while. She comes back with witnesses. Oh, you can scare a lot of money out of a man when you catch him in something like that! This is a form of the badger game that always works. There are lots of laws to protect us little nine year old girls from evil men; and when Mama Gloria and a couple of friends start talking that prison-bar talk to a poor man, he'll shell out all the money he has."

They were in the street now and going north towards the stone church. The sign said that it was St. Malachy's Church. Duffey knew about St. Malachy's in St. Louis where Bagby

used to go, but he hadn't even known that there was a St. Malachy's in Chicago.

Wings! There were wings all over it. The stone itself was quivering with the beat of wings. The whole south front had three spread-winged archangels, and the east and west sides each had nine big-winged angels. Who could feel a moth winging through that great wingedness?

"There's a priest in his rose garden," Charlotte said. "Oh they are red! But I'll have to call him away from them for redder things. I'll have to—" and Charlotte was gone over there—

"—to get myself straight before I do other things this day," Charlotte was still jabbering. "And when I steal that stash at the opportune moment, I will steal it with a clean and pure heart. Oh there, father, come along now. You have some high absolving to do in a hurry."

"You, little girl, you cannot have anything that requires a hurry."

"Oh 'Little Girl' your reverend wrongheadedness! There are big-girl things that I have been about. Come along, servant of the servants!" Charlotte and the priest entered the church, and other people were beginning to arrive and enter.

Yes, the moth power was very heavy around there. Ruddy St. Malachy's on the northside was catching the morning sun on its rose and winged turrets, and all the holy and giant things were working for Duffey again. But why did the moth not define itself!

Oh, maybe sixty or seventy people went in, women and men and children. There was a stunningly beautiful Italian girl who elevated Duffey's soul. She was not the moth. Whatever her role, she was something else. If the moth must be female, why three quarters of the people who entered the church were so. These were the beautiful holy women of early morning. There was a rather chubby young woman with blonde hair under a black veil, and with half-shut,

smiling eyes. Duffey loved her instantly. There was a regal lady with a high fling to her head. She was either a queen or a show girl. There were Polish ladies and German ladies, and Irish and Italians and Greeks. And the moth was among them.

Half an hour later, when mass was over with, Duffey still didn't know.

"Oh, you look so anticipating!" the beautiful Italian girl said to him then. "A happy thing will come to you today."

"You will meet her today, will you?" a German lady asked him. "And you will be very happy together. Live so that you will deserve the happiness that comes to you."

"You saw your wife for the first time a half hour ago," a gypsy woman said to Duffey. "You saw her first over your left shoulder. All luck to you, red-headed man."

"What is your father looking for so hard?" the chubby young woman with the smiling eyes asked Charlotte. "Nothing is worth looking that hard for."

"He thinks she's worth it," Charlotte said. "She's a moth. And he isn't my father."

"Why how stuffy of him to be chasing moths!" the young woman said in a voice that had a familiar sound. "When you catch her, will you stick a pin through her head and hang her on the wall, man?"

"Only when she defies me," Duffey said. The chubby young woman helped herself to a red rose from the rose patch then. So did the regal lady who was either a queen or a show girl. All the people were gone soon, and the moth presence was gone with their going. But which one has she been? Duffey and Charlotte went to eat breakfast at a little café twist the Church and the hotel.

"By the pink stone angels of St. Malachy's, I don't know which she is!" Duffey moaned.

"Whoops, whoops, my love and my boy, I'll help you no more," Charlotte chortled. "I have brought you to her this

morning and you have talked to her. I'll do no more for you. There are things that a man must do for himself."

Charlotte fell asleep over breakfast. When she went to sleep, all the orneriness went out of her face and left it sheerly beautiful: as she was then, so should she be forever. She would be one of the supreme pieces in Duffey's Uncollectable Art Collection, along with that ivory figurine Beth Keegan, along with—well, with several others who are still to appear.

She woke up, and the orneriness came back into her face, but it could only partly displace her beauty. They made a date, to meet again at noon that day, at another little café that was across the street from a certain club. All the Mullenses were to be there, and Duffey was to bring the moth if he could find her by noon. Charlotte who was a mentalist assured him that he would have the moth by that time.

They kissed when they left the café. And there wasn't any way to take the orneriness out of Charlotte's kisses.

Duffey's phone was ringing when he got back to his hotel room. And the voice on the phone was now doubly familiar.

"Miss Lily Koch is in today," said that half-haunting voice, "and she wonders if you would like to come by her shop at once. She is most anxious to see you."

4

The voice gave Duffey the address of the shop. Duffey went out of his room and downstairs and out of the building, and tumbled into a cab to go there. He was excited, for he remembered Lily with almost total pleasure. He also found that the moth presence was strong as he came to the neighborhood of the shop. It wasn't far. Chicago is miles and miles, but all the places that one would want to go are

within about six blocks of each other. Duffey would never find out what the rest of the city was good for. When he came to the ornate stoop and door of the shop (it was an Art-and-Elegance shop) Melchisedech knew absolutely that the evoking moth was inside it.

Was Lily herself the moth? Duffey had always loved her a little when he used to see her during his school days. He loved her a bit more in memory when he didn't see her any more. And now in his expectation he loved her almost totally. Well, almost...

And it was Lily who met him in the doorway. She threw her arms wide for him and gave him the biggest kiss in town.

"Oh, it's my bashful schoolboy!" she cried. "Melky, Melky, I love you. I was always so fond of you, and I still am. Oh come in, come in. I almost hate to give you up."

"Don't ever give me up, Lily. I've just found you again."

"Oh, I'm not the one, dumbhead. Our magic wouldn't mesh together, don't you remember? Letzy, look what a fine lout we have here! Ah c'mon Melky, why couldn't it have been me? Why do guys always have to go further and do better? Oh, you came all the way to Chicago on a signal that went out over the sly media, and now you don't know who she is! Don't you remember that one of your talismans was rib-shaped and that you gave it to me? Don't you remember that we said it might not work very well? Now you've even come to the right shop, and you still don't know it when you've found her. What do you think of him, Letzy?"

"Are *you* the moth, Lily?" Melchisedech asked her. There was a puzzle here.

"Me? A moth? Do you think it's a moth who's called you to Chicago? Oh, Duffey, she's a butterfly who's exploded into the next stage, Psyche herself. You really are, Letzy!"

Duffey had known that some laughing person was watching them there, someone with a half-haunting voice, someone who was chubby and had smiling eyes and a

dazzling soul. He wouldn't look, but he felt the whole world enhanced by that watchful presence.

"What sort of moth were you looking for, Duffey my love?" Lily asked.

"*Tinea evocata*, the evoking moth," he said as he had said once before. "*Tinea indagatio*, the seeking moth. *Tinea letitia*, the joyful moth. Where is she? Lily, why aren't you the moth?"

"*Letitia!*" Lily howled. "Oh, oh, what a name! Letzy, don't you think that Letitia is the silliest name in the world?"

"My name is Letitia Koch," said that chubby girl Letzy who had been looking at them and laughing at them. "Why won't I do? Why can't I be your moth?"

And that is the way that Melchisedech Duffey met his wife.

Oh, all the details had been at hand for anyone to recognize them. Letitia was the chubby young woman with the smiling eyes who, that morning, had asked Charlotte "What is your father looking for so hard?" Charlotte had known who she was. Why hadn't Duffey known it? Letitia was the half-haunting voice that Duffey had spoken to on the telephone several times. Well, she was Lily's partner and sister. Why shouldn't she have answered the phone there?

"Do you remember when you gave me that talisman when we were kids?" Lily was asking. "But I couldn't use it myself. It wouldn't work that way. We have things here in our elegant shop that people look at and see nothing to them. 'Why is it priced so high when it's crooked?' they ask me about that talisman. 'Why is it priced even higher than the beautiful pieces?' 'It is because God will not allow me to put the PRICELESS tag on it,' I say sometimes, but it is priceless. And it isn't crooked. It's rib-shaped. Oh Melky, Sebastian and I both used to try to awaken the art sense in you, and you already had it. How incredible of you to have selected Letzy a dozen years before you saw her! How discerning of you to know that she was really priceless!"

"Will we live over the bookstore?" Letitia asked Duffey.

"Yes. We can start moving things in today," Duffey said. Things were going very fast for him, for them all. "Do you know about the bookstore?"

"Yes. It isn't a bookstore yet, but I used to walk by there often and I knew that it would be a bookstore. And last week I had Gabriel show me through all the shops and all those upstairs rooms where we will live. I've made sketches of how things should be arranged there, and I'm sure that they will fit in exactly with your plans. I felt your suggestions several times while I was making the sketches last week. We will be married the day after tomorrow. I've already made most of the arrangements at St. Malachy's."

"It's magic," said Lily Koch, "and it belongs to you dumb bums. It doesn't come to smarty people like me. You came five hundred miles to her, Duffey, and then you didn't know her when you were three feet from her. And Letzy won't be working for you. She'll still be working with me here. You can't afford her at your place. And she wouldn't be able to afford your inevitable follies if she didn't keep her half interest in Koch's Galleries."

"Do you always shake like that, Duffey?" Letitia was asking. "It's the delayed action shakes that you have. There's nothing to be afraid of. It's only me, and you already love me. Now we must get to work. I've already hired a truck. You haven't much at your hotel, but we'll move in what there is, and then we'll move in the first loads from my place. Then it will be time to meet that mendacious midget of yours. Do you know that she is pulling grand robbery at this very moment and that it runs into several millions? Duffey has a mendacious midget, Lily."

"I shouldn't wonder."

Well, actually the whole thing was arranged by a couple of astute and invisible senescals. Royal persons can't be trusted to arrange marriages for themselves.

Duffey and Letitia left the shop then, and they began to move things into their new home up over the new book store that still hadn't any books. Letitia hadn't cut her hair as many had done in that year. She had great cascades of it, and it was somewhere between blonde and scarlet and walnut in color. She had a pleasant ruddiness of complexion and a really high comedy look to her. Her chubbiness was an asset, an extra-ness, a surpassing part of her perfection. Not chubby: she was full-bodied. She was priceless, yes, but only to the very deep-seeing would she appear so at first encounter. Her eyes were somewhere between sea-green and Melchisedech blue. She was younger than Lily, and she was taller than Duffey. They moved things for a couple of hours. Then they went to be keeping their noontime date.

It wasn't the little café they were really going to. It was the Colony Club across the street from it. The Mullens bunch was waiting, and Duffey arrived with the two beautiful Koch sisters.

"You wouldn't have fooled me, Charlotte, not for a minute," Lily said. "Nine year old girl, not you!"

"She fooled me for a moment this morning," Letitia confessed.

The Colony was none of your little, dimly-lit clubs. It was sun-bright in the noontime with the curtains drawn back from the grand skylights. It had splendid vulgarity in everything. There was fast money that was as good as wealth at the Colony, and there was a cheap-shot artistry that spelled success. The Colony represented Chicago noon-time beef dinners and sly-boat Canadian whisky. There were gaming rooms, and drinking lounges with loaded sideboards. The Mullenses, except Manolo who must have been a pretty new son, were known in the Colony Club, but they were known as the Cavendishes; and they were known as show people. The Kochs were known there as art people. But the two families had not met before.

"I am a millionaire now, Duffey," Charlotte told him as she enticed him into a corner away from the others. "I pulled it off, though I believe that there was one of those mind-alarms in the walk-in, and I triggered it. No matter: that mind-alarm couldn't have known me. Oh, I've been a millionaire before, for short times, but not this big a millionaire. I am a natural-born pirate. Now I've stolen and reburied a bigger loot than any Kidd or Blackbeard ever saw. But it's become quite dangerous. There was an alarm somewhere, given to someone. It wasn't a physical alarm, but still it was given. And now I'm followed, but they don't know what I look like. The mind-alarm picked up the name Mullens somehow, but that's only a throwaway name with me. This is the last day I'll use it anywhere.

"I love your affianced wife. How could you not have known who she was this morning, since she is at least partly of your making. Don't you even recognize your own handiwork and signature? Duffey, do you know that she does not count as one of your twelve prime creations? She is a bonus. The rib-shaped talisman is extra, the once-in-a-lifetime gift to a creating magician. You're still allowed the royal twelve.

"This place is full of psychics. Your affianced is a very good one, and the skinny Countess is one. That dark-and-secret-eyed Sebastian over there is one. But Lily isn't. We have never met your friend Sebastian, though we all come to this club when we are in town. He seems to have been abroad every time we have been in town. We understand that he is very rich and that he fancies himself as a gamer. Those are two things that we love in a man. He'll not miss what we take, Duffey."

"But will *you* miss what he might take, Charlotte? I warn you: Sebastian is good at everything."

"How enviable. And I and mine are only good at half a dozen things, but we are very, very good at them. Ah, we kiss here, and your new wife only chuckles. Can't I even

make that one jealous? She knows I'm a midget. She knows that I'm not a little girl. Oh my God, either my sister or one of your ladies has ordered the Harvesters' Dinner for everyone. Oh, I suppose that's all right in the Colony Club. After all, this is Chicago."

Roasting ears were central to the Harvesters' Dinner. There were mountains of them. And every kind of beef and potato and bread. Oh Lord save us, cabbage and kale and sauerkraut. Cheeses and sausages and Polish sausage, hot biscuits. No, that was only the beginning outline of the Harvesters' Dinner. They would keep bringing stuff in.

Sebastian Hilton was at table with them, though he was supposed to have dined earlier somewhere. He kissed the four ladies. He already knew Lily and Letitia well. Did he know that Charlotte Mullens or Cavendish was not really a nine year old girl? He must have known it from the way she kissed.

Sebastian still had the dark-and-secret-eyes and the not-long-for-this-world look. He still brought expertise and joy wherever he went. And nobody could remember, after he had dominated a conversation and after he was gone, what words he had used, though no one ever forgot the effect of him. He always spoke well and excitingly, but did he really speak in words?

Later, after the heavy Harvesters' Dinner had been put away, Sebastian came to Duffey and Letitia when they were on the roof observatory, and he added to their togetherness. He was of one mind with them both, as Duffey and Sebastian had been of one mind in their earlier years, as Duffey and Letitia were of one mind presently and forever hence.

Later still, Duffey and Sebastian were together in one of the private rooms of the club. Certainly Sebastian knew all about the wedding, more of the details than Duffey knew. Two days before this, Letitia had engaged him to be best man. Certainly he knew that Duffey was going into business with Gabriel Szymansky. It would be a good business. Oh,

Duffey would lose his golden touch some day, but his money barns should be pretty well full by that time. And of course there would be disasters. It was good that he would have the priceless Letitia. Besides, she was rich. Duffey hadn't thought of that part. Lily Koch had had the name of being a very rich girl during her school days. And Letitia was her sister. It was not a main thing, but yes, it was a good thing. Sebastian and Duffey talked together for an hour. Theirs was an exceptional friendship.

Then Letitia came to them again. She said that they must be off. There was very much to do. They found Charlotte and Gloria Mullens playing bridge against Lily Koch and a strange, ashen-haired, smiling, slim girl. Duffey was startled. He had heard her mentioned as being in the club, but he hadn't been able to spot her before. He knew who she was: the skinny countess to whom Charlotte had referred, and the earlier countess of mind-plundering encounter. Duffey knew her from Sebastian's mind. He even knew how it would be to kiss her.

"This is a friend," Sebastian said of her to Duffey. "She is someone I used to speak of, Melchisedech, and you never believed in her. But she is real. She is the Girl Countess."

Duffey kissed the Girl Countess and she kissed him. It was just as he had remembered it.

"We must go," Letitia said.

"And I must go," Lily told them. "Take my hand, Sebastian, but beware. This small Charlotte is weird beyond anything in the world."

Duffey kissed the girls: Gloria (somehow he knew it would be the last time he would ever see her), Charlotte (there would never be a last time for his seeing her), and the countess again (after all, she was special; she was the only countess that Duffey had ever kissed). And he left with his Koch girls.

But Duffey and Lily and Letitia were all in laughing wonder in the street.

"The Mullenses, that is to say the Cavendishes, make their living as card sharks," Duffey explained.

"Of course they do," Lily said.

"And Sebastian is the absolute expert at everything," Duffey added.

"Of course he is, and so is his countess," Lily said. "And she's as much a mentalist as your Mullens girls. They love each other, I can tell, but it will be bloody cutthroat. It will be the battle of the century, and we are missing out on it. Do you know what the Countess said about the two of you? She said that it was so nice when a couple share the same psychoses, especially when they're all about the belief that you can create the scenes and people who are around you. She says that the only danger is that the bottoms of both of your worlds will fall out at the same time."

"Oh I know that," Letitia said, "but it's always the same world with us and the same bottom. But the Countess has her own psychotic beliefs. She believes that she's real. But Sebastian made her up a long time ago, and Duffey took her up then. And it was myself who projected her into the Chicago scene. Sebastian was clear thunderstruck when she appeared in Chicago, and he still is."

"Oh Letzy," Lily worried, "sometimes you really believe in your private fancies. And Melky will not be a corrective to you. He'll abet you. And finally you won't even know what objective truth is."

"I don't know what it is now. I only know that it isn't. There is no such thing, my gilded Lily, as objective truth or objective fact. The whole world is made out of subjective private projections. Some of them become consensus projections, but they aren't really objective even then."

"Oh Duffey, cut her tongue out if you can do it without scandal," Lily said. "The rest of her is priceless, but sometimes her tongue isn't worth fifteen cents a pound. You two are my treasures and you are made out of pure gold. But there are individual coins in you that are counterfeits even if

they are made out of true metal. Some of those coins have the Crown and Image of 'The Royal Malarky of Salem' on them. We will eat together late tonight, and then we will go to a late show somewhere. Oh, you don't know how much you are loved, you two!"

Lily left them then, and then went about the appointing of their new house. Duffey bought tools and lumber and good cherry wood paneling. With a few hundred deft strokes he would be able to do wonders to those upstairs rooms.

They took time off to visit City Hall, and St. Malachy's, and an insurance company, and a bank, and a lawyer. Then they cleaned up...

"Damn it, Duffey, the hot water doesn't work," Letitia protested.

"Did I say it worked?"

...and changed clothes and went back to the old Lily/Letitia apartment...

("Oh, it will be so lonesome and desolate here," the spirit of the apartment was moaning, "Where can I get me another sister? Where can I get me a husband? How will I live alone?")

...where the spirit Lily had a candle-light supper set out for them.

It was a wonderful supper. Lily cried and blew her nose. And Letzy said that it was the most wonderful condiment spread over everything and that they should market it. "But how much can you produce a month, Lily? We have to know."

They went out to Morgenstein's *Comedy Music Box* on Randolph Street and saw an extravaganza. When they came out of there, a paper boy was calling the midnight edition 'Double Murder in North-Side Hotel'.

"Get me one, Duffey," Lily said. "I love murders. I so envy those whose lifestyles allow them to indulge."

"I don't love this one," said Letitia who was prescient.

"Neither do I," Duffey moaned. He got a paper from the boy. His hands shook so much that he spilled coins all over the pavement. Then Lily had to take the paper from him to read the story.

Yes, it was Gloria and Manolo Mullens who had been murdered in that same little hotel that Duffey had moved out of that day. It was a particularly savage assault. The two had been tortured first. Then the two skulls had been crushed as though great spikes had been driven into them, but the murder weapon was not found. And there was no trace of the girl about nine years old who was believed to have been with the Mullens since their coming to town.

The Mullens were known gamblers, the paper said, and it was surmised that there might be underworld connections. Three slant-faced men had been seen about the hotel, and people said that they did not belong there.

"Do you think that Charlotte got away?" Lily asked.

"Of course she did," Letitia said, "but she shouldn't have pulled the other two into her danger. They were tortured to get information that they didn't have. But Charlotte was already away. The killers didn't know that their target was a little girl or a little midget. To them she was only the mysterious 'brain'. They somehow had the name 'Mullens' from the mind alarm, and the name of the Mullens' hotel. Charlotte is in a pre-selected hideout, and I bet she gives the nuns there holy hell."

"Did she really steal the millions?" Lily asked her usually psychic sister.

"Yes, and she will own it all securely when the coast is clear. Then she will be the fascinating millionaire mendacious midget of our acquaintance."

"What was the weapon?"

"I can't quite see that part," Letitia said. "There's a sort of sea spray that comes between. I can't tell what the cruel hooked thing is."

But Duffey recognized the destruction of the cruel hooked thing. It was the boat hook in the hands of one of the three slant-faced stevedores of Duffey's dream or psychosomatic trance of that very morning. And he recalled with nausea Charlotte's dream-or-trance words:

“Aw, ugh, it always sickens me to hear a boat hook crunch into a skull like that.”

5

Melchisedech Duffey and Letitia Koch got married. It was a nice wedding.

Has there ever been on earth a true golden age, either particular or general? Yes, there have been dozens and dozens of particular golden ages. These usually involve small areas and small numbers of persons, but they can be absolutely authentic.

One of them was in a portion of North Chicago in the years 1925 to 1935. Then it continued as an electrum age (gold and silver mixed) till about 1946. There were some minor disasters in this electrum section of it, but there were none in the pure gold first section.

Some of the persons who made up that golden age were Melchisedech Duffey and his wife Letitia (they were central to it, and in a sense co-creators of it), her sister Lily Koch, their parents August and Elinore Koch. And their friends Sebastian Hilton, Margaret Hochfelsen (she was the ever-young countess), and the associate Gabriel Szymansky and his wife Miriam and his son Kasmir. This Kasmir or Casey was one of Duffey's prime 'creations'.

There were the arty friends of the golden age: Hierome Groben, Nicky and Vicky Van Horn, Fanny Warneke, Mordecai and Elvira Scott, Cassius and Mona Greatheart, Bruno

Schnabel, Otis and Sheryl Pentecost, Leo Ring. There were the bookish and literary friends generally, some of them being newspaper people as well: Christopher Tompkinson, Demetrio Glauch, Clarence Schrade, Leo Crowley, Tony and Evelyn Apostolo, Rollo and Josephine McSorley, Norman Shipman, Januarius and Elena O'Higgins.

There were the musical friends going from the operatics to the rag-timers and the Chicago-hots and the string-band people, composers, players, stagers: Linus Aloysia, Basil and Dorothy Noah, Rufus Weaver, Enniscorthy and Mary Sweeny, Newbold and Audery McGeehan, Andy Paige, Vitis and Emily Karger, Cletus Kenealy. All those were good people.

There were the ecclesial or vineyard or churchy people: Thomas Chroniker S.J., Tim and Gale Tuthill, Sister Mary Cornelia (Sullivan) Foster and Alma Ruch, Dan and Nan Donovan, Sister Mary Aurora (Rittenhouse), Martin and Katherine Redwine, Frantz and Elaine St. Clair. It was the vineyard people who kept the world turning. All other persons in the world were parasites upon the labor of the vineyard workers.

There were the theatrical people: Nemo Cobb, Anna Louise McCutcheon, Duke and Jenny Colfax, Leander Crane, Jim and Rosemary Hogan, Beverly Boyd, John and Fisher Nolan.

There was the Monster Giulio who was outside of categories.

There were the people of a scientific bent: Mark McClatchy, Cyril Holland, Catherine Quick, Morris Poor, Horatio and Mildred Burgandy, Sherman Slick, Silas and Maud Whiterice. You just don't meet people like that every day.

There were the confidence and gamine friends: Charlotte Garfield (yes, she's the millionaire mendacious midget again), Gideon Sedgewick, Mary Regina Toast, Ralph Kirby, Ira and Rebecca Spain, Victor Ryan, Homer and Evangeline

Durban, Fred and Helen Batavia. These were all of the better grade of confidence people.

There were the very young friends who came into the bookstore or were around the neighborhood: Mary Francis Rattigan (Ah, look out for that one, she was one of Duffey's quasi-creatures created by a talisman that only half-worked), Mary Catherine Carruthers (Ah, look out there again, she was one of Duffey's true creations by a true talisman), Hugo Stone (Damn that kid anyhow!), Ethyl Ellenberger, Margaret Stone (She was *not* Hugo's sister as she used to brag sometimes; she was just barely his cousin).

There were the sporty people: Tom (Big Bear) Rogers, Herbert Conger, Calvin Bonner, Enos Dorn, Angelo Cato, Henry Chadwick, Mike and Peggy Conner (golf), and Peter and Jenny Reid (tennis).

There were the college and university people: Jerome and Grace Plunkett, David and Dinah Joyce, Susan Parker, Cicero Brazil, Jasper and Jane Howe, Isaac and Mary Lightfoot, Judley and Pauline Peacock.

There were the money and commerce people, or anyhow the rich people: Adrian Hilton (he was an older brother of Sebastian), Shawn Mallow, Pat and Lois Tyrone, Mary Kay Pack, Julian and Bernice Edgewater, Mary Carmel Hooligan, Clement and Irene Temple, Vincent Finnerty.

And then there were the slippery people. Pleasant they were, competent they were, interesting they were. And slippery they were. Larry and Olivia Hallahan, Ben and Shirley Israel, Marjory Redfox, Elmo Sheehan, John and Alive Calumet, Hermione (she was so slippery that nobody ever did know her last name).

The heart of the near-north side Chicago golden age was the seven rooms of Melchisedech and Letitia Duffey, and the shops below them. And the Koch's galleries two blocks down the rich street, not the poor street. Yet it was around the doorways of the poor street that the people and their interests coalesced.

Above the poor shops on the poor street there were many apartments that were fine on the inside, and many of the golden age people lived there. There were little ratty eating places on that street. There were other eating places that looked almost the same on the outside, but the rats in them picked their teeth with gold toothpicks. There were a number of sly pigs along there, for as long as prohibition lasted, and some of them were good music and good entertainment places.

The people of the Duffey nations found themselves interesting. They found their gatherings and meetings their comings and goings and entertainments, their cafés and shows and studios and saloons and open-handed houses and apartments, their small part of the city all to be highly interesting. And they set their seals forever on those streets and corners and buildings and parks. A stranger there even today will know that people of peculiar awareness were once there.

Melchisedech and Letitia designed that shanty-and-gold neighborhood as they designed other things, events and life scenarios and persons themselves. Duffey had a natural gift for creating people complete with their surroundings; and one of his creations, Letitia, had the gift even more strongly than he had.

"The purpose of life is the creation, arrangement, and staging of interesting and awareful scenes, and then entering into them to play vivid parts," Duffey said.

"Luffy Duffey, you say that all so well and you say it all so often," Letitia told him. Duffey never had a disagreement with any of the Kochs, not with father August, not with mother Elinore, not with Lily, certainly not with Letitia. Melchisedech fell in love with his mother-in-law Elinore at first sight when she threw her arms wide and give him the biggest kiss in town. This was the gesture and act that all three of the Koch ladies had. Lily would sometimes do it with

walk-in customers in the Gallery. And it is always good luck to be in love with your mother-in-law. Elinore had style.

And the father-in-law August Koch had a pleasant sort of integrity and a rich competence. He also had many old European ideas, such as dowry.

"It is one of the things that we must not neglect," he told Duffey. "It is good to settle these things; it is good to make the transfers of money and property early. I am very pleased with you, Mr. Duffey. The figure I have in mind..."

"I know the figure you have in mind," Duffey said. "I'm a mentalist. Set it at one quarter of that. And set it so that we can draw only the interest on it for a period of twenty-five years."

"I hate to do that," August Koch. "You will have difficulty reaching your proper station of life under those conditions, and I believe that persons should reach their proper stations while they are still young. There are also certain pieces of art that must fall to your share. You are something of an art dealer and you may be able to make those choices by yourself."

"I will make the choices with the help of Letitia and Lily."

"Yes, of course," August said. He was an extremely muscular man in the German style. Very neat, very imposing, very proper.

"There is one other thing, Melchisedech," August said. "Let us walk in the back street and talk about it. You are the only other man in the family so you must help me decide things."

They went out and walked in the back street, the poor street that Duffey's shop opened on. There was the smell of lilacs there. Many of the poor people along the street grew lilacs. These were dust-covered bushes, and often they were broken and bruised by people coming and going. But it is the bruised bushes that have the sweetest smell.

"It's about Lily," August Koch said. "Somewhere we will have to find a husband for her. I know that she wants to

marry and is pained that she has not found a husband."

"But Lily can marry anyone she wants to. She has everything."

"Prospects for a husband she does not have. Oh, she has beauty and brains and charm and goodness and wealth. It would seem that these things would be enough. They aren't. I do not know why men will marry one sort of woman and not another. It really seems that none of the women whom men marry are really of top quality, excepting my wife, and yours, of course. What do you think it will take, Melchisedech, to get a husband for Lily?"

"Only a little willingness on her part. I can think of a hundred good men who'd marry her if she'd have them."

"Think of a hundred and first man then, Melchisedech. I am sure that the one hundred are somehow rejected, by whom I do not know. I will lay out a dowry of one million dollars for a good man who will marry her. If that sounds crass, then I am a crass man. But I love that daughter. Think of the man for her, Melchisedech."

"A million dollars wouldn't matter to the one I think of, Sebastian Hilton."

"They were engaged once, in a sort of way, I believe. Possibly they still are. But they will not marry. It's the fashion of young people of their circle to believe that Sebastian will die young. But I am assured by his father and uncles that he is in near-perfect health."

"Maybe he will die in near-perfect health then," Melchisedech said, "but I'm one of those who believe that he will die young. I get things out of his future, up to a point, and then I do not get any more of them. That cut-off point isn't very far in the future."

"Be careful of the mentalist bit, Melchisedech. You won't know your own future, and you won't know any other future effectively either. I get things out of *your* future. Many things that you have always depended on will collapse. There's a bridge nearby that's an allegory of you. The props will be

and are being knocked out from under that bridge one by one. And the props will be knocked out from under you at the same time. You and Letitia also get your pick of the townhouses, you know."

"We'll make our selection of that soon, but we won't live in it for the first few decades."

"And think about a husband for Lily, Melchisedech. As the only other man in the family, you must counsel me on these things. Oh yes, and I've brought you a Christ."

August and Melchisedech went and got it. They put it with seven other Christs in Duffey's Priceless Item Room.

"Etenim Pascha nostrum immolatus est Christus!" Duffey said in sudden amazement as he saw it there with the others, "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us."

"Yes it is powerful and it is sacrificial," August Koch said, "but you will still ask, as Kipling's devil asked 'Is it art?' Were the other seven from the first?"

"Not all of them," Duffey said, "not at first, but all of them are now."

Among the things that Duffey had to show for the seven dark years or lost years of his life were Seven Christs. He had found them in strange places of the world and dispatched them to himself back in the more ordinary world. And now they had all arrived from the various places. Now they had all been assembled together like seven thunders; some of them joyful, some of them agonizing.

There was the Danish-bread Christ. Yes, it had been baked out of wheat and rye flour mixed. It had been made into a dough, formed into a Christ-head, baked, and then varnished. It was the case of someone making a better loaf than he knew. In some parts of Denmark such Christ-heads were baked for Corpus Christi Day. But how had this one happened to be such an astonishing work of art, and how had it been recognized and saved?

There was a tavern sign Christ from Hungary of the time of Béla Kun. Hungary had been communist then briefly for

the first time, and Christ things were hated. But there was no hatred in this picture, only total heartiness. The Christ was drinking off a huge mug of beer, and the mug was ornamented with spinning worlds. It was a powerful and pleasant face, and it was unmistakably Christ.

There was a Christ figurehead from an old Goanese ship that had used to sail on the Indian Ocean. There was no other figurehead art that could stand beside it.

There was a cigar store Christ from the island of St. Kitts. Yes, that's right. It was like a cigar store Indian of the United States of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with the fingers of the right hand formed into a cone or cup to hold cigars. Some negro artist of the island had done it in imitation of that convention. It was Indian-colored. But it was bare-headed, and it had Christ's face. The artist had known that face without knowing what person it belonged to.

There was a staghorn Christ from Mesa Negra that was done in hard stone nine thousand years before Christ was born. It was of a man impaled on the antlers of a giant stag. The posture was that of a crucified man, and that man was Christ.

There was a negroid Christ from Bahr El Ghazal in the Sudan. It was of a tall person with a cattle herder's crooked rod in his hand, and it was Christ without any doubt. It was a freestanding, life-sized statue in tufa stone, and it couldn't have represented anyone else.

There was a turbaned and laughing Christ from Turkish Anatolia. It was done in monumental marble, reused from some earlier thing. It was fresh painted not fifty years before, but it had been carved a thousand years before. There was something so intricate about that laughing figure that it could be studied and laughed with for a lifetime. It was a thunder piece. All seven of them were.

All were representations of the same person, there was no doubt at all about that. And all seven of them were once-in-

a-lifetime discoveries. Together they were stunning, and there was no way that a price could be put on any of them.

The Christ of August Koch was set with the others. It was the once-in-a-lifetime discovery of August. It had cost much more than any of the others. And possibly it had less thunder in it. But it was outstanding. Let it be there with the others for a few years. Then we will judge it. Nobody can judge such a thing immediately.

August Koch had a yacht on Lake Michigan. It was named The Argo.

“What a coincidence!” Duffey howled when he heard the name. Then he was puzzled at himself. What was Koch's yacht's name coincident with?

There was a small bridge or viaduct on the near-north side. It didn't look a lot like the bridge that August Koch had said was an allegory to Duffey. It ran above streetcar tracks or perhaps train tracks, and it also ran above a trafficway that carried heavy trucks. It was wide, to carry the traffic of a busy street; but it was not much longer than it was wide. The little bridge even had a name. It was the Pont du Sable Traffic Trestle.

Someone knocked out a minor support of it only a week after Duffey began to notice it and to tie himself in with it. A heavy truck going at high speed had hit it during the night. This support was not repaired or replaced. An engineer told Duffey that it was merely ornamental, that it hadn't been a weight-carrying support. They disguised its appearance with a little bit of stone gimcrackery. And yet that support had carried weight, with Duffey anyhow.

It was five years before the next underpinning was knocked out of that bridge.

Giulio the Monster came to Chicago.

Duffey had known Giulio for the first time on the night of Duffey's going into business in St. Louis. He had seen him several times since, at intervals of a year or several years. But how did Giulio find them in Chicago? Giulio was not particularly literate and might not have been able to follow the most simple directions. He did not know Duffey's name: he paid very little attention to names. But he and Duffey were weirdly in accord, and Duffey had once given him a talisman.

First off, Duffey heard a roaring on the stairway.

"Oh my God!" he cried out. "I'd know that roaring anywhere!"

It was late, about three in the morning. Duffey and Letitia had been in bed, but she was not in bed now. Where was she? And what would she make of the monster? The Monster Giulio would take some explaining, even to a person as good as Letitia was.

Duffey rose to prevent what clash there might be, though he recognized Giulio's roaring as more joyful than agonized. It was a greeting really. He also heard the yelping of a mean and demented dog receding outside. And Letitia's glad voice was heard on the stairs also:

"Giulio, is it really you? Oh, you *are* welcome! I've wanted so much to see you all the time. I knew you would be in town sometime and I couldn't think of any way of letting you know where we were."

Duffey, coming to the head of the stairs, saw Letitia throw her arms wide in that gesture that all the Koch ladies have, and then hug the Monster Giulio heartily and give him the biggest kiss in town. Why had Duffey worried? How could there possibly be a clash between Letitia and any good person anywhere?

"Giulio, how did you get in?" Duffey called from above them.

"By the door. Only when I'm in a savage mood do I come through the walls."

"But I'd locked the door carefully. There have been three burglaries of shops in this block this week, and I made sure I locked the door."

"Nah, man, nah, the door was not locked. Doors are not locked to Giulio when he comes to see you. It would bring on all my sickness if I found the door locked."

"Your dog, Giulio, bring your dog in," Letitia said. "We want to meet him too, and we will feed him. And we will feed you."

"Nah, woman, nah," Giulio said. "I haven't any dog. What you heard howling and growling was a devil that afflicts me. He knows that he cannot come into a house where good people live. But he growls and grumbles about it."

"Oh, Giulio, you haven't any devil," Letitia told him. They were in the kitchen now and she set out everything: coffee, whisky, cheese, bread, sausage, beef, beer and wine and pie. "Why, you couldn't afford a devil, Giulio."

"Nah, this is a poor guy's devil," he said, "and I haven't even got clear title to him. I'm a Gadarene Swine, as Duffey's brother used to say. It's a devil who comes to live with me when he no other place to stay. He eats my soul up, and now there are only crumbs left to me. Whenever I do throw him out, he comes back with those seven devils worse than himself. Oh, there is howling then."

"I have heard it," Duffey said. Ah, it was good to have the big fellow come and visit them, however he had found them. Duffey was whistling a tune that Bagby used to whistle every time Giulio showed up in their neighborhood in St. Louis. Bagby, as a fact, had used to call it the Gadarene Swine Song. The tune of it was cruel and comical at the same and funny. Oh yes, there was a devil associated with big Guilio.

Giulio stiyed with the Duffeys a week that first time he came to them in Chicago. All the friends accepted him and all of them knew what he was. Mona Greatheart did him again and again in clay. Groben did Doré-like engravings of him. Elena O'Higgins came to talk to him. She said that she would do a feature story on him in the *Chicago Herald and Examiner*.

Sebastian and his countess came to see Giulio, and they gave him their respect. They made it seem that, if he were a monster, he was a royal monster at least. There must have been at least one of his kindred in the cellar of every castle in Transylvania, the Countess said. There was one, anyhow, in the castle in which she was raised. But the Countess said that Giulio was not a Troll, that he was a Teras.

"Yes, I am a Teras," Giulio confirmed it.

Sebastian and the Countess Margaret and Letitia and Melchisedech sang the ballad 'Hi, Ho! The Gadarene Swine!' that was based partly on Bagby's old tune and partly on a Transylvanian stringed melody that the Countess remembered. They sang it in four voices and Giulio, who could not sing, howled a *basso accompanamento* to it.

"Oh Giulio is a Teras weird.

Hi, Ho!

He raises possums in his beard. Hi, Ho!

He works the rivers and the brine.

The way he gobbles joints of kine

I'd never have him in to dine

Except he is a friend of mine

Hi, Ho! The Gadarene Swine!"

"Have you wife or children yet?" Letitia asked him.

"We don't even know your full name, do we?" the Countess Margaret said.

"Giulio Solli is my full name," the Monster said. "Yah, I have a wife and two sons and a daughter. And I gave the

talisman, Duffey, the talisman that you gave me to give. I held it to my wife's belly at the proper times. And I put it in the son's hands at the moment of his birth, and he would not let go of it for a month."

"Which son, Giulio?" Melchisedech asked him.

"The dago son, of course. You wouldn't give a thing like that to an Irish son, would you? Ah, it's a dark and lonesome road he'll have to travel, he has so much of me in him. And who will hold a lantern for him on that road?"

"I will, Teras," the Countess Margaret said.

"I will, Giulio," Sebastian Hilton said.

They sang another stanza with chorus of the Gadarene Swine Song then, and Giulio himself roared out the invention of the tenth line of it.

"The Teras had a mane and crine.

Hi, Ho!

His back is like a porcupine. Hi, Ho

His eyes have got the runny blears.

He has such awful hairy ears

They drive me all the way to tears.

Hi, Ho!

His brow it has a low incline.

His instrument's of knotty pine.

Hi, Ho! The Gadarene Swine!"

Then Sebastian and the Countess Margaret left the Duffeys and Giulio with an all-persons embrace.

Late one night, Giulio rose suddenly and burst out of the house. There was a defiant roaring outside in the street when he stood there. And then there was the cry of rending agony as Giulio's devil came back into him again.

Then he was gone.

Book Four

Tales of Chicago

"The Lord has sworn and he will not repent: You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchisedech."

Psalms 109:4

Chicago is a lot like purgatory. Well, that is better than many cities that are a lot like hell. There is usually blessed salvation at the end of the Chicago ordeal.

Duffey lost his facility for making money. It was the first of his major facilities that he lost, and he would miss it the least. The magic of making money is, after all, a boyish trick. It hardly becomes a grown man.

Duffey's virtue had become a little bit scrappy before this, but he had never lost it. Duffey had wakened one morning knowing that he had lost his extraordinary talent for making money. He would never get it back to the full. The riddle of the camel and the needle's eye was solved. Duffey had always wondered how he was going to get to Heaven. That he might not always be rich hadn't occurred to him.

On that early morning, he walked to the Pont du Sable Traffic Trestle. It was still an hour before sunrise. Lanterns were blinking around the tracks and the trafficway below the bridge. An underpinning had been knocked out by a heavy and berserk truck during the night. So the bridge was weakened. And the golden touch was gone.

Duffey's loss-of-the-gold-touch feeling had been preceded by a dream of worms getting into his gold and eating it out, leaving the coins and bars as no more than empty shells.

There had not been in the dream, and there would not be in reality, any sharp sense of loss over the devoured gold.

In the world generally, the worms had been getting into the gold pretty badly. Duffey's dream of lost gold had been illuminated by an actual mass of gold in Duffey's place several years before this. His father-in-law, August Koch, had asked if he might store a quantity of gold at Duffey's place. Duffey had reinforced the upstairs floors to take the weight of it. This had been at the beginning of the fourth quarter of the year 1929. August Koch had put something more than twenty tons of gold in Duffey's place, about twelve million dollars worth of it. Of course August Koch had other storage places. He sold pretty much everything he had and put it into gold. It would be immune to bank collapse and to the depredations of rust and moth. And, when he decided to spend it again, he would be able to buy a lot more with it. Twenty tons of gold will not take up nearly the space of twenty tons of wood or steel or even lead, but it made the Duffey quarters a little crowded for a while.

Of course Duffey and Letitia had known what was going to happen, and Sebastian and his brother and his countess, and Charlotte Garfield the mendacious midget, and Mary Regina Toast and Irene Temple and Vincent Finnerty had known. These people were all mentalists as far as money was concerned. The Duffeys made a good thing out of the tricky years, and they would still have a good thing. That was why it was not too serious for Melchisedech to lose the particular facility for making money. He already had plenty of money.

As to Duffey's virtue having become scruffy, he was still as scrupulously and even offensively honest as ever. His man's courage was still strong. His charity had holes in it, but he hadn't really lost too much ground there. He had really gained a little bit in charity and understanding from his natural state. He wasn't a boozier nor a vaunter to excess. He did not even belong to those most sinful of people, the

bores. He would still do things for strangers that he would not even undertake to do for himself. He was a firm friend to all good men and a gallant partisan of all good women. And that may have been the trouble.

Duffey loved his wife Letitia and her sister Lily and her mother Elinore. He loved them seriously and he loved them clownishly, and he may even have loved them illicitly, even Letitia. He loved his sister in St. Louis, and his old girl Beth Keegan, and Olga Sanchez of the torchy shoulders who still worked at his Rounders' Club, and Evelyn London. He still loved a younger girl there, Gretchen Sisler, though she wrote him that she wasn't as young as all that now. And he got to St. Louis at least once a year, to take care of business with his St. Louis partner Charley Murray, but also to see the ladies.

He loved many ladies from the seven hidden years of his life also, but there was no way he could return to visit them.

He loved the Countess Margaret Hochfelsen and the mendacious midget Charlotte Garfield. And Mona Greatheart and Shirley Israel ("Duffey, how could you!" the words about Shirley rang out of the future and had to do with a photograph), and Josephine McSorley and Catherine Quick and Elena O'Higgins and Beverly Boyd and Mary Lightfoot and Jenny Reid.

He also loved several younger girls, especially from that bunch who used to come into his bookstore. They came in from the time they were eight or nine years old: Mary Frances Rattigan, Mary Catherine Carruthers, Mary Jean (what was her name anyhow before she married Sebastian's nephew Hilary Hilton?), Margaret Stone. Ethyl Ellenberger. It was all hearty fun with the little girls, of course (hell is made out of such hearty fun), and Duffey played the funny uncle with them. There was an old, black leather sofa in the bookstore, and Duffey would wrestle the little girls on it. Mary Frances and Ethyl were usually in the store together, and what Duffey did to one of them he did to the other. In

their double number was safety. Really, it was all right with them, but maybe it wasn't all right when Mary Francis was there by herself.

And it probably wasn't all right with Mary Jean (she was a hot little vixen from her childhood) and with Mary Catherine Carruthers who was in love with Duffey. They were very friendly little girls for about ten years, from the time they were eight or nine years old.

He felt that he was watched with them, when he could not be. In particular he felt that he was watched by that fat-faced, four-eyed little boy Hugo Stone (Damn that kid anyhow!). "Duffey, baby, how *are* you?" Hugo would say from the time he was a nine year old freak. Hugo often carried a camera slung around his neck. What? Was there a threat in that? Maybe, but not an immediate threat. We leave the little girls for a while.

Was this Hugo Stone the same person who turned up later as Absalom Stein? Once it was settled without doubt that he was. But later a doubt returned.

"There wasn't any Hugo Stone," Margaret Stone sad just the other day. "That was just a joke name."

"There *was* a Hugo Stone," Melchisedech Duffey insisted. "He used to come into my bookstore in Chicago from the time he was eight years old. I know him. And he was the same person as Absalom Stein who walked out of here only five minutes ago."

"No, no, Duffey, he was hardly ever the same person," Margaret said. "I don't believe that he was ever the same person at all. That branch of the family always used the name of Stein, though Absalom ran around quite a bit with one group of his Stone cousins. I will tell you what Stone boys there were. They were David, Hershel, Jacob, Samuel, Max, Nathan, Avram, Yosef, Stuart, Isaac, Myron, Efram, Barnard, Sidney, Joel, Robert, Milton, another David, another Nathan, another Robert, twenty boys in four families of first cousins. They all lived within three blocks of your old

bookstore. I was first cousin once removed from all of them. Absalom Stein who lived half a dozen miles north was a second cousin of them all. I'm sure he was never in your place."

"But who was Hugo then?" Duffey asked.

"There wasn't any Hugo. That's just a name they made up because they knew you couldn't tell one of those kids from another. Sometimes Hugo was Nathan, sometimes he was Avram. Most of the times he was the twins Myron and Efram. They would always be in your store at the same time, and you would always think there was only one of them who got around awful fast. They could steal from you easier, there being two of them."

"But which one of those damned little kids used to say 'Duffey, baby, how are you'?"

"I don't know who used it first," Margaret said. "There were half a dozen of them who took it up later when they found out that it bugged you."

"Margaret, I am a mentalist and perhaps I am a sorcerer," Duffey said. (All this conversation took place just the other day, many years after the Chicago era.) "I know what constitutes a person. And Hugo Stone (damn that kid anyhow!) was the same person as Absalom Stein who is present almost too often in these later years."

"Duffey, you are a moth-eaten sorcerer and I don't believe that you do know what constitutes a person," Margaret said.

"I know who he was. I *made* him!" Duffey insisted.

There was also the fact that Casey Szymansky insisted that he hadn't known Absalom Stein until he met him in New Guinea along about 1943 in the army, and that he hadn't known him in Chicago at all. He had heard though that Absalom Stein had been a Communist in Chicago under the name of Hugo Stone. This had always puzzled Duffey. Casey Szymansky used to be in Duffey's bookstore every day (after all, his father owned the building and was a sort of

partner of Duffey in the businesses), and Casey had many clashes with Hugo Stone there. There had been a natural antipathy between the boys and sometimes it broke open. Twice Casey had fist fights with Hugo in the bookstore, and Casey lost both fights.

Would it not be a rum thing if Hugo had indeed been non-Hugo twins, and both of them had gotten their knocks in on Casey?

2

Toward the end of the year 1931, about three hundred prominent citizens of Chicago began to receive a well-printed news letter named *The Answer*. It touched on economics, it touched on ethics, it touched on municipal and federal government, it touched on education and religion and militarism. Mostly it touched on the theory of government and on the voices of the poor crying aloud to be fed. And it was very quippy. Some of the things in it were good, and even the bad ones were startling.

It gave a post office box to which comments and rebuttals might be sent. It was a north side post office box. *The Answer* was to come out thrice weekly, on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. That startling first issue was out on Monday morning, and it was delivered by U.S. Mail.

In those days, the more deeply populated areas of large cities, and all the downtown areas of them, received four mail deliveries a day. Less densely populated areas received only two mail deliveries a day, and this was felt by some to be an injustice. A mailing dumped into any mailbox by seven o'clock in the morning would be delivered anywhere in the city by ten o'clock of the same morning. Postage was two cents for first class and one cent for second class. 'The

Answer' with stenciled addresses and its one cent stamp on every publication was a morning newsletter.

Melchisedech Duffey, being one of the three hundred most prominent citizens of Chicago, received *The Answer* in the first mail one Monday morning, and he read it with his breakfast. He gasped in wonder as he gazed at it. There was something damnably familiar about it, and yet it was a first issue, and its name 'The Answer' was not what struck a responsive cord. Melchisedech perused it.

And within one minute he was howling in wrath mixed with other things.

"I have never seen such an astonishing mixture of perspicacity of a truly brilliant order mixed with double-damned-foolishness!" he roared. "Letzy, have a look at this devilish stuff! It is inflammatory, and three-quarters of the time it is right! Look at it! Read it out loud! This pastiche is destined for the rise and fall of many, mostly the wrong ones."

Letitia Duffey read things out of it aloud. She had a fine scanning eye and a beautiful and haunting voice. Her voice was so good that she had recorded little time-and-temperature advertisements for the radio. People would almost cry when her voice said 'It is seven fifteen this morning, and seventy-one degrees'. Her voice could move a stone person. And now she read with astonishment and buried laughter.

"Letzy, Letzy," Melchisedech gave the left-handed voice to her recital. "How is it possible for a person to be so sage and so silly at the same time?"

"You manage that trick very well yourself, dear," Letitia said with kindness.

"I am a special case," Melchisedech clarified. "This is a madman writing that stuff. Oh, how he will hook the unthinking! How he will latch onto followers!"

Melchisedech was slow in catching onto it, but Letzy had caught it already.

There were things out of the wisdom of Augustine and Aquinas and Pope Benedict. There were worse things out of Nietzsche and Shaw and the Webbs and Machiavelli and the old and the new Roosevelt. This was ponderous hodge-podge. "But it will catch on!" Melchisedech moaned. "See if it doesn't, Letzy."

"Oh, I can stop it any time I want to," she said.

"How, bride of my breast, how?" he wanted to know. But Letitia simply looked at the palm of her hand and smiled.

"The Answer is the Leader!" *The Answer* proclaimed. "Make yourselves worthy. The Leader will appear this very week, *if you are ready for him.*"

Listen, that initial Monday edition was nothing compared to the second publication of Wednesday morning. It was expanded from a four page to a sixteen page journal. There were more than a hundred letters from the prominent citizens in that Wednesday morning edition. The letters were favorable. People were howling their agreement. And there was the stunning lead article 'The Quest for Leadership is Ended; the Leader has been Found: I Am the Leader!!' That was a thumper. Why, there was something magnetic about all of this! The leader was hypnotic. He made it felt that the need for leadership was the most striking need in the city and the nation and the world, and that the need was being met. This was happening all too fast.

"Why wait till next year for a leader who cannot lead. As it shapes up now, the contest will be between a good but inept man, Hoover, and an evil and even more inept man, Roosevelt. That almost turns the stomach against the whole idea of leadership. Do not let it do that. The world is crying for leadership. Well, that cry will be answered Friday night with the 'Appearance'. First Chicago, then the Nation, then the World."

"Letitia!" Melchisedech cried. "Did you ever hear of such a case of ego in all your life? Did you believe that in all the world there could be such an egomaniac as the writer of this

stuff? Have you ever encountered such an egotistical person in all your short life?"

"Only one," she said. "You."

"I'm a special case," Duffey said.

"You must admit, Duffey my pride, that he sounds more and more like you. He is coming to be you almost exactly —"

"Me, with the brains knocked out, yes. I've wondered why he sounded like me and still lacked my sense."

"Perhaps on some level, dear, unbeknownst to you..."

"No. I have not done this thing, Letitia, not on any level of my being, not in my conscious or in my unconscious. But there is a stunning similarity."

"It's done on your little press, you know."

"It is? Oh, of course it is. Why didn't I realize it? That's why it looked so familiar from the very first glance. Why, why, why? Who is doing this?"

"I can't answer the 'why, why, why' part of it. I'm not a good enough psychologist for that," Letitia said. "But it's quite plain who is doing it. How many confounded geniuses are there in this block anyhow?"

"Only myself, Letitia. I can't think of another one."

"Oh, you blind man!"

"But I believe that somebody has been entering the shop at night. A box of medals has been stolen."

"What medals?"

"Mostly world war medals, a residue from Gabriel's old pawn shop, and I've been selling a few of them to collectors. There are all things from congressional medals of honor to French honorifics and the German Blue Max with the old Emperor Maximilian's seal on it. There are generals' and admirals' insignia gone. Could the coming 'leader' want such things?"

"Yes, I think he could," Letitia said.

The Friday morning *The Answer* was a rouser. It got down to what the quippy publisher called the 'crushed louse' by which he meant the 'nitty gritty'. It gave the time and place

where 'the leader' would appear that night. It would be at seven o'clock in the evening. It would be in Henry Horner Park beside the big equestrian statue. It was asked that a dozen or so bands should volunteer their services. 'It will be better, in the day of wrath, that we knew you' was a warning. It was asked that each of the recipients of *The Answer* should see to it that at least a thousand people of their rousing should attend the Appearance. 'Yes, ten thousand each. Three million persons will not be too many to see the great thing.' There were other exhortations, and then there were many articles of uncommonly good points.

"It worries me that he makes such good sense," Duffey said in exasperation.

"That is what has always worried me about you, dear," Letitia said.

"How can anybody be so intelligent, and then reach such irrational conclusions?"

"People ask the same thing about you, dear."

"But he is so much like me. It's weird."

"Don't worry about it, Duffey. I think he'll outgrow it," Letitia said.

There weren't any three million people in Henry Horner Park that evening, but there were about a hundred thousand of them, in the park itself and in the adjacent street. The three hundred copies of *The Answer* must have been read by quite a few persons and word-of-mouth had been at work. And the Chicago daily papers had been playing the thing up for several days. There weren't any dozen bands there, but there were three of them. It would be better for those three in the Day of Wrath.

By the great equestrian statue in the park there was a live white horse. It was clothed in gold lamé and such things and was beautiful. Duffey knew that horse. It lived in his own neighborhood. It had been a fire horse. It had had a proud way of holding its head 'like a Roman Emperor' as

somebody had said of it. And one man had been so impressed by its dignity that he had bought it from the fire department, which was doing away with horses anyhow, and had given it a pleasant home in a double vacant lot. And there it had reigned as the pride of the whole neighborhood. It wasn't really an old horse, no more than nine or ten years old. It was large and solid. It was itself a living statue.

There were signs about there. 'When the Leader comes and mounts the horse, then the world will recover its strength'. 'At Seven O'clock the Leader Comes: Be Ye Ready for Him'. 'The High Rider of this Horse will Become the Leader of this World: Perhaps He Will Also Be An Angel Out of Heaven'. That was extravagant stuff. It was almost time for the leader to make his appearance. The three bands were playing military and inspirational music. There was an air of expectations.

"This is too much in my style to be a total hoax," Melchisedech Duffey said. "Letzy, do you think it will be a qualified hoax then? Letzy, Letzy?" But Letitia had slipped off. She intended, for reasons of her own, to intercept 'The Leader' and not allow him to arrive in full regalia.

And he was in full regalia when she blocked his path. Croix de la Legion D'honneur, Croix de Guerre, Medal of Honor, and Navy Medal of Honor, Iron Cross, Order of the Golden Fleece Medallion, Crown of St. Stephen, Star of the Ninth Fusiliers, many more decorations. Some of them were non-military, some of them were of Chicago lodges, but that didn't matter. He was in scarlet tunic, belted and bandoliered. He wore a shako on his head. He had a hussar sabre and his father's Knights of Columbus Fourth Degree sword belted on him. He was booted and spurred. And he was walking in a transport with nearly-closed eyes. This was the leader who would take over the world as soon as he got on the noble white horse. But Letitia Duffey stood in his way.

"Oh, don't spoil it, Aunt Letitia, don't spoil it," the Leader said.

"I'm not spoiling it, I'm saving it," she told him. "After you get on the white horse, you won't have any idea what to do then, will you? You haven't thought beyond that point, have you?"

"Sure I have. Plan 'Beta' goes into effect as soon as I mount, and plan 'Alpha' becomes past history. I will take over Chicago and then America and then the world."

"Nonsense, Casey, it'd never work."

"If you stop me, Aunt Letitia, you'll be sorry in the years to come."

"How so, little Leader?"

"You'll get a look at some of the leaders who are really in line to take over the world if I don't. You'll realize in that day that you should have let me go ahead with it."

"But my opinion in this day is that I should not let you. All right, put all the medals in this paper sack, Casey. And take off that tunic and all those belts and wrap them up together."

"All right, if I can go on to the park then and see the horse. Oh he does look magnificent! And see the bands up close."

"All right," Letitia said. They wrapped up all the regalia so that it looked like a package of almost anything, and went to the park.

So 'The Leader' did not appear that night, and *The Answer* did not publish again. The bands played merry music, and many of the people lingered in the pleasant park for several hours and bought coney islands and hot dogs and candy and pop and bevo and ice cream from the hokey pokey men. Well, it was a good outing, and perhaps it was a hoax on all of them.

Kasmir (Casey) Szymansky was ten years old then. He was the son of Gabriel Szymansky the owner of the building where the Duffeys lived and a sort of partner of Melchisedech. And Melchisedech himself had taught Casey to print on the press in the back of the bookstore. He had

also transmitted many of his ideas to the boy. That was Casey's first grab for universal power.

Of course he was a genius. He was one of Duffey's creations, though Duffey had pretty much neglected him so far. Now he would have to be accepted as something anyhow, as a churn in which butter of a particular flavor was churning and coagulating.

In later years, Casey always said that the 'Leader' bit was an antic and a hoax all the way. It wasn't though. Letitia who saw his face as he came towards the park that evening knew that it was for real.

One day, it was eight or ten years after the Leader and the White Horse episode, Duffey looked at this Kasmir (Casey) Szymansky more closely than usual. He saw that Casey was a young man and no longer a boy. This was the day that Casey's father, Gabriel Szymansky, had died. Casey had already been to college, off and on, for some time.

This business of the kids growing up when Duffey wasn't looking had infected quite a few of the youngsters. In the true and non-lineal accounts, there is never observed a strict sequence of the years, and all the Chicago years were non-lineal. The Chicago series really ran for twenty-one years, from 1925 to 1946, but it never pretended to sequence. People change hardly at all over the years, and then in one minute, they are greatly changed. Attitudes and towns do not change gradually, and neighborhoods and people groups do not. They change suddenly after long times of changelessness. And so it was with the young people.

Duffey did not always have excellent rapport with Casey while the boy was growing up. Kasmir W. (Casey) Szymansky was born on October 7, 1921, so Duffey was about twenty years his senior. Casey thought more of Duffey than he did of his own father (Duffey had made him, and Casey was somewhat aware of that), but he still didn't think very much of him.

During Casey's college years, in and out of Notre Dame and Depaul and Northwestern and Marquette and the University of Chicago, he had always published a college magazine. This was invariably known as the *Crock* or some variation of that name. And when Casey went no more to college, for he never finished, he moved the last of the *Crocks* to the back room of Duffey's book store and brought it out there on the little press. It quickly reached a few dozen people around the country with eyes for issues and tendencies. It even became known, in a sort of a way, so that Casey was ticketed by recruiters for future reference. Casey, at this time, had come into money and property from his father's estate.

So much for that. But the *Crock* would play a part in the difficulties of Duffey as well as in the difficulties of Casey Szymansky.

Now, t'was a fact that Casey was a talismanic child of Melchisedech Duffey. And just how much reality was there in this business of talismanic persons? Is there a difference between a person made out of ordinary clay and a person made out of talismanic clay? Was Duffey more than a Pate, a Kumanek, a Nonos, a Nasho, an Athair Baiste, a Sponsor, a Padrino, a Godfather? There are hints forever of non-species sponsors, fairy godmothers and such who have special power over infants. Is that of a creating sorcerer to his creatures the same relationship? God knows. But it is a relationship that is not without its effect.

Well Duffey did have, much of the time, special talents. No human person can see the future clear and uncompromised, but many persons can see pieces of it: scenes, congruencies, cardinal happenings, particular glimpses of the minutiae of special persons, fateful crossroads, tides of persons and groups, disasters, vignettes total and detailed many years

before their happening. Melchisedech Duffey had this prescient quality very strongly.

And one who can see coming happenings, even a little bit, may come to believe that he is causing those happenings. Duffey believed, somewhere in an uncensored or unaccountable part of his mind, that he had caused and was causing a certain number of people to happen and to continue to happen. These were the talisman people, and it *did* seem as though Duffey had some part in their creation.

Duffey was not an ordinary person. He was the Unique, the One, the Only Melchisedech. He was more than twice as old as the Wandering Jew. So he was not necessarily wrong in believing that he had special powers.

One of the faculties that Duffey would lose, for the duration of the particular episode of life that he was in, was the faculty of effectively bestowing totems or tokens or talismans. So another prop will be gone from under the bridge. Another power will be lost to him. But he was in full possession of his totemic facility when he gave out the twelve primary talismans.

The talismans were small magic objects. They were small, graven, flat, gold sticks, maybe in inch wide and eight inches long. That is one description given of a Melchisedech talisman by one designated person who said that he had seen his own talisman. But mostly, a talisman was absorbed by the small child who gripped it in his tight hand for some days until it became a part of him. And just what was graven on the talisman? "The being, the personality, the encounters, the scenario, the fate, the destiny of the person designated by the talisman, all were graven on it," so said this particular designated person.

Some time before the year 1920 or 1921, before young Casey was conceived or born, Melchisedech Duffey had given a talisman to Gabriel Szymansky for his son. This giving was within Duffey's hidden years.

Once in St. Louis, Duffey had given a talisman to his friend and associate Charley Murray to be bestowed on Charley's sister's child, a child as yet unnamed, unborn, unthought of.

It was also in St. Louis that Duffey had given a talisman to Giulio Solli the monster. Giulio, as far as can be remembered, was the only person sane enough to ask for the object, the fetish, the talisman. He was the only one who understood from the beginning just what he was supposed to do with it: hold it to his wife's belly at the time of conception and often during the months of her gestation, and put it into the hands of the special son the moment he was born.

And Duffey had once given a talisman to Lily Koch to bestow on her younger sister. This sister was already born but was not fulfilled. It was a special case. That talisman was of a different shape, and it did not count in the primary twelve.

And somewhere, sometime, in the hidden years most likely or even before them, Duffey had left a talisman for a yet unborn boy in Wisconsin, and another for an unborn boy in Morgan City, Louisiana. He had given one to a job printer in New Orleans for a daughter, and one to a truckline operator in Galveston. And he had given several in Chicago, and one to a seaman from Australia.

Duffey often wondered how all this progeny of his would get together, for it was a group that he was creating. He wasn't, so far, very good at making up scenes and scenarios for these talismanic children to play.

Absalom Stein, one of the talismanic children, developed a theory about all of this. It was Stein's Diminishing Theory of the Duffeys and the Groups. He said that a Melchisedech had made a group anciently, that this group had then made another Melchisedech after its own preferences, that this new Melchisedech had made a new group, and with each step the persons involved were slightly diminished. 'But how

far down that series are we now?', Absalom would ask. If we diminish even slightly at each step, what giants we must have been once!

3

The golden melon that had been Chicago in the good years had begun to show spots of rancidness and oiliness and even rot along about the year 1933. Oh, most of that thing would be good for many years yet, but there were soft spots.

The depression began on March 6, 1933. That was the symbol and arena of the new rancidness. It was, as Tony Apostolo said, a contrived thing created by a group of crooked men playing at being crooked gods.

But hadn't the depression begun back in 1929? What, have we one of *those* in here. No, it didn't begin back then, not really. Here, let Tony Apostolo tell how it all went. Tony was a partisan of very many things. He was extravagant in his opinions and statements; but most often he was able to back up his extravagant statements with facts or with three-quarters facts.

"There is the black legend that the depression began in October or November of 1929. It's a manufactured legend of unsavory instigation, but today it stands almost unchallenged. I challenge the legend right now. It's astonishing that it could ever have been accepted. Here is a nation that has lived through these sharp and bright and recent years. Here is a people who should have known what happened to them in their day-to-day awareness. But then somebody comes along and tells them 'It wasn't that way at all: it was this way'. And the nation listens to the screed of false history and says 'Well, we don't remember anything like that, but if you say it happened, that way then we will have to accept it. We are wrong and you are right and our

memories ere false. Who are you anyhow? Oh, we aren't allowed to know that?' The question of who these falsifiers are is still not answered, but the falsifications are accepted."

"You talk tripe!" Rollo McSorley swore savagely. Rollo was a partisan of all things opposite to Tony's things. There were about a dozen persons talking together this day at Melchisedech Duffey's.

"It's said that the depression began with the stock market crash in 1929," Tony continued. "I was in New York then working for the old International News Service, and I noticed that the reports of certain persons as to what was happening did not have much point of contact with what really was happening. Oh, the market busted, but it didn't carry very much with it when it went down. In particular it didn't carry any jumpers-out-of-the-windows with it, though the window-jumping suicides remain a showy part of the legend.

"I was there. I checked out that part of it at the time. We used to get an average of about sixteen suicides a day in New York. The numbers rose and fell, and I knew why they did. People kill themselves out of boredom when it verges onto hysteria, and for no other reason. When there was something interesting going on, people did not kill themselves in great numbers. When there was not much of interest going on, people did tend to kill themselves more readily. The market bust was interesting, as a world series is interesting, as a big flood or a big fire or a big murder is interesting, or the beginning of a war.

"On October 24, 1929, the day of the market bust, there were eleven suicides in New York, none of them by jumping out of windows. The next day, October 25, when it was realized that something interesting was happening in the market, the suicides fell to four. On the 26th, there were two, on the 27th, there were three (but that was a three-way suicide pact of a personal nature), on the 28th there was one, and on the 29th and 30th, there were none at all. The first time in eleven years that the city had gone two days in

a row without a suicide. On the 31st, there were five, on the first of November, there were seven, and thereafter, they rose back to normal. There had not been any suicide that could be traced to losses on the market."

"You are going to get hurt talking like that," Rollo McSorley said. "You're sure going to get hurt talking like that." McSorley and Apostolo were both newspapermen.

"But there is a legend of ten thousand suicides caused by the market crash in New York," Tony continued. "It's true that there were ten thousand cartoons of men suicide-jumping out of windows. And there were ten thousand cheap shot orators and politicians screaming about the suicides. But there weren't any suicides."

"You sure can get hurt talking like that," McSorley said, and he was serious. "You can get killed talking like that."

"The depression finally came on March 6 of 1933, this year," said Adrian Hilton, a banker and an older brother of Sebastian Hilton, "and were those vested interests ever glad to see it come! They had worked so hard to bring it about! The depression came with the bank moratorium of March 6th to 9th."

"You know the comic strip of the wild detective tracking down the purchasers of cans of poisoned beans to keep them from eating them. He shoots all of them through the head just in time to stop them. The purchasers are all dead then, but they aren't dead from eating poisoned beans. That's the way it was with the banks last spring.

"Some of the banks were shaky. Some of them were overloaded. A very few were in actual danger of failure. So all of the banks were forced to close. And only the politically pure and amenable banks were ever allowed to open again. Quite a few thousand of the banks were looted completely; the new dynasty that had taken over the country had to get billions of sly money from somewhere. And most of the banks that were not allowed to reopen have never seen their

records or assets since then. Some of the bankers objected to being robbed so summarily. Those who objected the loudest were murdered."

"You lie in your fool throat, Adrian!" Rollo McSorley howled out.

"Maybe the legend of the murdered bankers is on par with the legend of the market-bust suicides, Adrian," Melchisedech Duffey suggested. "Were there really any cases of it?"

"Yes there were, Duffey," Hilton said. "More than four hundred such cases."

"Name one," McSorley cried out. "Name just one who was murdered for making a noise about it."

"My father," said Adrian Hilton. "They killed his favorite bank. And then they killed him. We have other banks in our family, but we haven't any other father."

"You lie again," McSorley charged. "Your father was killed by a husband who was jealous of him. And he had a reason to be jealous."

Adrian Hilton and Rollo McSorley had a fist fight then. It was a large and free-swinging fight. Both of these men were gymnasium fighters and the fight was a whanger. And after Melchisedech and others had broken up the fight, the whole subject was dropped as being an incitement to violence. So this particular group never did arrive at a clear history of what happened to the nation in those years. And even today, there is much to be said on each side of it. The truth is on one side, and all the wordiness is on the other.

But with the coming of the depression, no matter when it began, there was one change that only the more civilized of the people noticed. One of the ancient joys had been weakened, and perhaps it was weakened forever. This was the joy of money, the joyfulness and joyousness of money. It became at least a deferred joy. And pray that it may not be deferred forever!

Joy in money is one of the primordial joys. Melchisedech had known this in his fundamental being of Boy King; and it was not entirely an evil joy. Shakespeare wrote of "Africa and golden joys" . And Clough has it "How pleasant it is to have money, heigh-ho! / How pleasant it is to have money!" And God the Father tells it "in the day of Prosperity be joyful." His crony Belloc has the version "I'm tired of life, I'm even tired of rime / But money gives me pleasure all the time."

Wealth and weal are things that are well. They are joys. And was there ever a more golden verse than, "The king was in his counting house / Counting out his money" ? In the Litany of the Blessed Virgin, she is called "Tower of Ivory" and "House of Gold" . These things are not allegories. They are holy and joyous wealths. Is it a vanity of God or is it a joy of God to be touched only by the gold of the gold-lined chalice?

What of Holy Poverty then? Do you still not understand, you of the leather ears? It is the best things that Holy Poverty sacrifices, and not the worst. And money is one of the best things, one of the seven joys. There is a Holy Poverty, and there is a Holy Wealth. Only devils will ever regard an unholy poverty or an unholy wealth.

"An anemia I'll suffer if there is a dearth of gold dust in my veins," Melchisedech said once. "Well then, I'll suffer it if I must, but it will be a suffering and a dearth."

Have we forgotten what it means to be fortunate? To be fortunated, that is one of the good things.

And yet, money wise or materiality wise, the depression wasn't important from any viewpoint. But there came a depression in immaterial and aesthetic and spiritual things that was degrading and depressing. There were other sorts of lavishness that disappeared out of the good life along with the lavishness of money. Lavishness in art was straited, and in music. The grandeur had paled. Lavishness in food and drink was lost and was not to be recovered. And even

wisdom and goodness seemed to be dealt out with more miserly hands now.

"There is nothing wrong with fleshpots so long as Irish Stew is what is served in those fleshpots," Rollo McSorley used to say. There had come a time when Rollo and Josephine McSorley were forever urging Duffey to indulge in the fleshpots. There was a row of particularly gaudy fleshpots on Randolph Street. Yes, they were the opposite of grand; they were gaudy. Letitia went along with Duffey and a bunch of them a few times, and then she would refuse it.

"There is something quite a bit wrong with those places," she would say. "You can talk all you want to about the broad view and the narrow view, but those places are stifling bogs. I am going to have to take some third looks at a lot of things around here if my friends are hanging out in places like those."

"These are the green years that we're living in now, aren't they?" Duffey asked, trying to reason with himself and his wife and some of his friends. "Well then, we should provide ourselves with green places for our amusement. But are these places 'Fiddlers' Greens'? Are they 'Thelemes'?"

"Duffey, those places are old fashioned," Shirley Israel told him. "They just aren't in it with 'Herm's' and the 'Curley Q' and 'Seven Steps Down' and 'Blow Brass' and 'The Farmer's Daughter' and the 'Dung Heap'. These places are where all the real people are going now. These, and a few other places make up 'Fleshpot Row'."

"And the only place where they still have real Chicago-Hot Jazz is on 'Fleshpot Row'," Rollo McSorley said. Rollo had wooden ears, as a matter of fact, and he didn't know one jazz from another. But there was some slight truth in his statement. Since the speakeasies had turned or closed into legal saloons (this was probably in 1934 or 1935 that Rollo and his gang used to lead Duffey to the pots) there weren't a lot of places where one could still hear really bad music.

There never had been any doubt about the worthlessness of Chicago-hot: "But it's our kind of worthlessness," Elmo Sheehan used to say. The Hot had just been kicked out of the back door labeled 'To the Trash Cans' when it came back in again by another door labeled 'Nostalgia'.

"I understand that your own place in St. Louis is quite like this," Ben Israel said once as several of them ate supper at the 'Curley Q'.

"No, it is not," Duffey maintained. "Though that place has nearly passed out of my hands now, yet I know that it would never indulge in some of the things that are indulged in here. Better things and just possibly worse things it might indulge, but these particular sicknesses it would not accept."

But there was a wit with a new flavor about those places. There was a fever for newness all along the row. The food was good, though sometimes of a squeamish aspect that was hard to define. The drinks were good when they did not have an illicit needle in them. The music was Chicago-hot right enough, but it emphasized everything that was wrong with the Hot. The loose people drifting about were really loose.

"I'll come no more to this place nor to any of them on the row," Demetrio Glauch announced suddenly one evening, and he rose from the table. "It's nothing but a stifling bawdy house. There are good supper clubs to be had; there are good music halls and dance halls; there are good saloons and good honkey beer halls. There are places where fine talk may still be found. But this place is good for nothing. I've had my fill."

Demetrio rose to go, and they derided him with their wit and contempt that had toggle barbs on it. Olivia Hallshan, Shirley Israel, Alice Calumet, Josephine McSorley, those women hissed at him like she-adders. All of them except Margery Redfox.

"Coming, Duffey?" Demetrio asked as he stood in that archway between the dining room and the entrance hall.

"Ah, not quite yet, Demetrio," Duffey told him. "I'll just finish my supper first." And Demetrio looked at Duffey with a weird sort of doubt and disappointment that would stand between these two henceforth.

Larry and Olivia Hallahan, Ben and Shirley Israel, Margery Redfox, Elmo Sheehan, John and Alice Calumet, Rollo and Josephine McSorley, and Duffey, they finished a really good supper. There was a comedian who was fair funny there. He was a natural, and yet he picked up a raunchy style that was unnatural. He had a tortured face behind some of his twisted jokes, a laugh-clown-laugh flesh mask.

Duffey had enough of the libertine in him already. This organized enticement was dangerous for him. He had enough trouble handling the liquor and the girls. The dope and the boys must not ever be for him. There had been certain sorcerers of these two advocacies whom he had not allowed to live when he had been Boy King so long ago. And if he had to let them live now, at least he wouldn't live with them.

Duffey rose, tardily it's true, and left in disgust. So those women and their slightly womanish men hissed at Duffey as they had at Demetrio a few moments before, with literal venom.

But later they would come after Duffey again with enticements and strings. They had designs on Duffey and they would not let him get clear.

Duffey performed his last public act of magic on November 13 of the year 1935. Oh, and it was almost his first public act of magic too, after his childhood or childhoods. Duffey was not a Charley Murray, to be doing magic tricks always. He was a real magician who concealed his magic. Real magic is not the sort of thing that one does for the public unless one is a Messiah. Magic is not given for the entertainment of swine or of the swine that is in

everybody. The showboat stuff simply isn't in accord with the genuine article.

A mixed company was talking at Duffey's one evening, and Morris Poor (*Doctor* Morris Poor, he had recently become) was expressing doubts as to Duffey having any of his hinted unusual powers.

"Melchisedech, I believe that you are insane," Doctor Morris Poor said. "There are little pieces of insanity floating up to the surface of you constantly. You have a doubled, even a tripled personality. You believe special and legendary things about yourself. Those things will split you wide open. They will kill you. No person can maintain too many realities. There's no other possibility to be considered: you are insane, Duffey."

The people of this mixed company looked at Morris with some distaste and astonishment. Judley and Pauline Peacock were present, Charlotte Garfield, Mary Lightfoot, Helen Batavia, Dan and Nan Donovan, two younger persons whose names will not be given at the moment, Mary Kay Pack, Hierome Groben, Demetrio Glauch, Tony and Evelyn Apostolo, Sebastian Hilton and his Countess Margaret, Rollo and Josephine McSorley, Elena O'Higgins, Ben and Shirley Israel, d'Alesandro, Margery Redfox. And Letitia Duffey and Lily Koch. And of course Melchisedech himself. They all looked at this Morris Poor who had thrown a sort of challenge.

"I believe that I am as sane as most persons, as sane as anybody here," Duffey said. "But I can understand why there should be doubts about me. Yes, I do believe some special and legendary things about myself, but they are not imaginary things. Yes, it is difficult to maintain several realities, but I do it as well as I can. As many realities as are given to me cannot be too many realities. And persons have been split open before and have been killed. But I will not accept it from you that I am insane."

"You told me once of fantasies that you had about giant hands that would come to your aid when commanded, and that could perform almost anything that was required," Morris Poor said.

"I didn't tell you any such fantasy. I told you such a fact."

"You maintain that it's true!" Morris demanded in a forensic sort of manner.

"True, yes, true," Duffey and. "I am a magus and I have magic powers. But I may not use them without a reason. You are not a reason, Morris."

"My challenge is a reason," the newly-doctored Poor said. "You claim that you can order the navigable giant hands to move things."

"Things. Yes, I suppose so. Things," Melchisedech said.

"To move mountains, Duffey, you fake?"

"A mountain's a little big, Morris, though I suppose it could be done. I could move a mule, maybe, if there was good reason to move a mule. Now drop the subject."

"No. Continue the subject, Morris," Rollo McSorley instigated.

"There is good reason to move a mule, Duffey," Doctor Poor said. "And the reason is that you're a fraud if you don't do it."

"Ah, I'm a fraud nine times a day," Duffey said, "but I'm not a fraud in this." Shirley Israel had been plying the company with a new liquor or mixture. She decided that things should get ripper here.

"I will bet one hundred dollars that he can't do it," Rollo said.

"I will bet one hundred dollars that he can," Tony Apostolo covered the bet. "I take you on it, Rollo. You are wrong in this as you are wrong in everything."

"Fascist, it is a bet!" Rollo spat.

Lily and Letitia led the conversation to other channels, but it kept coming back.

"Does anybody know where the nearest mule can be found?" Margery Redfox asked.

"Now we're getting somewhere," Tony Apostolo said. "Over by the Traffic Trestle. The street department still uses a few of them to pull the slip-shovels, and they're using some of them there this week. They're moving dirt and putting it in some new kind of reinforcements. The underpinnings of the Trestle keep getting wrecked."

"Drink up, folks," Shirley said. "I have something new I want you all to try."

"I thought this was new," Lily said.

"One more additive will make it perfect, I believe," Shirley said. "You will all love it."

"Not for a bet, Luffy Duffey," sister-in-law Lily said. "Not for a notion. Only for need. And I don't believe there is a real need for you to move a mule by magic."

"I know," Duffey said. "But there may be need to blow down the blow-mouths."

"There's no such need, man of my heart," Letitia assured him. "And besides there will not be any proof. Oh, you will do it, and the crowd will see you do it. But someone will addle the wits of all of them, because such private powers are not meant to be published outside of the kingdom."

"Let it go, Duffey," said Mary Lightfoot who was always a peacemaker, as was her husband Isaac who was absent this evening however. "We are supposed to let the blow-mouths bloom along with the good people until the harvest time at the end of the world. And then they will be cut and bundled apart and burned in unquenchable fire."

"It's too long to wait," Duffey said.

"But let us not disregard how the blow-mouths come to be among us," the Countess Margaret contributed. "Let us remember who sowed them. Do not forget that 'an enemy has done this'."

"Hold your mouth, skinny woman," Morris Poor said to the Countess. "And you keep yours shut too, skinny man," Rollo

McSorley said to the companion of the countess who was Sebastian Hilton. (Watch it there, Rollo, you don't know what you're doing.)

"Duffey, you are less than a man if you don't come and move a mule," Doctor Morris Poor declared. This new drink of Shirley Israel had struck with the force of a natural catastrophe.

"He is less than a man if he doesn't come to the Traffic Trestle right now," Rollo McSorley stated in red-eyed wrath.

"Ah well, maybe I'm less than a man then, but I'm more of a man than the two of you together, Morris and Rollo. Little creatures, we will go over to the Traffic Trestle right now, and I will do one of two things. I will cause the mule to be moved. Or I will whup Rollo and Morris both at the same time. I will do whichever of these things comes first. One of them is as easy as the other."

"I'll want this thing verified and witnessed," Morris Poor said. "I'll want representatives of the press present."

"Was there ever a more pressy crowd?" Tony Apostolo asked. "I'm a reporter. So is Rollo. And so is Elena O'Higgins. I'll call a photographer to come at once and cover it."

"I'll not trust your photographer, Tony," said Rollo. "I'll call one of my own I can trust."

"Sometimes three heads are better than two," Elena told them. "I'll call a lensman also." And these three calls and appointments were quickly made.

Twenty-seven persons piled out of the Duffey establishment in loud and unsteady fashion. They went to the Pont du Sable Traffic Trestle. Fortunately it was only a few blocks, and the party came to the lower level down under the trestle. Yes, there were three mules there, inside a little fence with the grading equipment. The three photographers arrived within half a minute of each other, and the stage was set.

"All right, Duffey, you fink, order the giant hands to come down and lift the mule and transport him across that little

traffic island!" Doctor Morris Poor crackled.

"Take it easy, Mule-Doctor," the Countess said. "Duffey is no fink."

"Shut your mouth, skinny crow," Morris Poor said drunkenly.

"Duffey, you're not fit to be under a mule's tail," Rollo McSorley bawled out. "You can't do it, and that's not all you can't do."

"Blow it easier, loud-mouth," Sebastian Hilton spoke softly. "We all know who does belong under a mule's tail."

"Shut up completely, you damned runt," Rollo barked. "I whipped your lying brother and I'll whip you. Hold off that skin-and-bones harpy, Morris."

"Easy, men, easy," Sebastian whined in that sissy half-sob that he used to pull so long ago. Duffey could almost hear the old words now, "Baw, lemmy alone, you big bully!" , so Duffey knew that one part of the project would be taken care of by Sebastian, and the other would fall to himself.

Duffey lifted his head to look at the lower or Fortean sky. And he ordered a silent order. It happened just as he ordered it. It's too bad that Rollo and Morris, the two who had challenged it so loud, missed seeing it.

It was their own fault.

"Don't touch my girl there," Sebastian Hilton had whined in that simulated, sissy way. And then two remarkable things happened in the same instant.

As to the one happening, twenty-four pairs of eyes and three cameras recorded twenty-four and three slightly different versions of it. Giant hands did come down. They were seen by some and sensed by all. They took the largest of the mules under the belly. The mule howled the horrible, clattering sound that only a frightened mule can give.

"Easy there, little fellow, easy there," a huge, black-man voice whispered from the low sky, and the mule relaxed with the certainty that these were authorized hands taking him up. The mule arched his back, and he was lifted through the

air; or anyhow he moved through the air, up over the fence and out of that little pen. And he came down again in that traffic island across a half-street.

The other thing that happened at the same moment was Morris Poor and Rollo McSorley being blinded and felled by slashing blows from the lightning-like Sebastian Hilton. Sebastian still wore a sharply embossed ring on either hand as he had when he was a school boy. Ah, those things could cut! Ah, Sebastian was fast with his hands! What a cocky sadist Sebastian was anyhow!

The piece in the *Chicago Herald and Examiner* (of November 14) was a modest one, and it tried to be factual. It was done by Elena O'Higgins. It made the simple statement that a mule had been transported thirty feet, before a score of witnesses, on the night before, under the Pont du Sable Traffic Trestle, transported through the air by mysterious conveyance. It said that the witnesses gave conflicting statements, but all agreed that the mule moved thirty feet through the air. The photograph that accompanied her story showed the mule in the air, but it did not show any giant hands supporting it.

The piece in the *Daily News* for November 14 was written by Rollo McSorley and was a bitterly facetious piece titled, "I was kicked by a flying mule." Rollo claimed that he was really kicked by a drink known as The Green Mule. He said that this drink was given to a party of people by a nefarious Jewess, and that damned if he didn't think that he wanted another drink of it sometimes. Rollo wrote: "Whatever it was that I bet, I lost my bet. Whoever I said I could whip, I couldn't. Whatever I said that somebody couldn't do, he did it." And the photo that accompanied this light-hearted story showed the mule in the air, and it showed giant hands holding it there. There were also brightish blurs here and there that might indicate some kind of double exposure. The three photographers had exchanged pictures, but the *Tribune* was the only paper that used all three of them.

The piece in the November 14 *Chicago Tribune* was done by Tony Apostolo. It had quite a bit of everything in it. It had statements from most of the witnesses:

“How did that mule get over the fence?” Judley Peacock had asked. “He jumped over it, that's how. I tended mules in the army and I know that a mule can outjump any horse. And the fence around that little pen wasn't more than seven feet tall. The mule jumped over the fence, and he got to the traffic island in two more jumps. On yes, there was a big black man up on the trestle, the biggest man I ever saw in my life. And he called something down to the mule. That's why the mule jumped. But the big man didn't lift the mule with his hands. It looked as if he did, and I thought at the time that he did. But he didn't. That would be silly. That mule got there in three big jumps.”

“When does a jump turn into a flight?” asked that beautiful and vulgar midget Charlotte Garfield. “That mule went thirty feet in the air, and that's all there was to it. No, it didn't exactly break it up into three jumps. It started to come down two times in between, but each time it got the elemental goad and it went up again without ever coming down to earth. Yeah, it was that big shine up there who did it. He reached down (his arm must have been fifty feet long) and put a three-stage firecracker under the mule's tail. He detonated that firecracker by voice, and every time the big coon hollered, the firecracker blew another stage and the mule went up in the air again before he had come down. I tell you, you could smell burnt mule all over the place.”

Really though, the evidence was pretty consistent. Three quarters of the witnesses said that it was a clear case that giant hands came down, lifted the mule, and transported it thirty feet and set it down again. That is what happened — a quite impossible thing.

Shirley Israel never did rediscover that combination of liquors to bring them all so near to the living edge.

Oh no, no, that wasn't Duffey's last public act of magic. We forgot about the frequent puppet acts that he put on, mostly for children. Melchisedech and Letitia Duffey would give these little magic puppet shows for the children. They would give them in fire stations, in community buildings of city parks, in lodge halls, in childrens' homes, in hospitals, in library meeting rooms, in special auditoriums, and in schools. Letitia would make some very good stringed puppets, and she could manipulate them and ventriloquize them well. Well, hers was a good puppet show in itself, and she had been putting it on for children ever since she was a child herself.

Duffey would bring only his banjo with him, and the flat-boater straw hat that went with it. For his puppets, he used local talent. He used mice.

There was an exciting difference between the actors in these Puppet Shows. The puppets of Letitia were wooden, or they were made out of twisted wire and pieces of tin cans, or they were made out of cloth. But the puppets of Melchisedech were alive and real. Mice.

Yes, mice. Local mice. Is there a place anywhere that does not have a few mice, inside its walls or under its floors or in its dark corners? It is no odd thing at all. It is almost universal.

Duffey would call for mice to come out of their crannies. And they would come, however many of them he commanded to come. Duffey had dominion over mice. They would come out, squealing fearfully. And Duffey would pick them up and place them on the table of the performance. Letitia would have token mouse costumes made, and would put them onto the mice who would now have been sweet-talked into friendly cooperation. There would be a funny hat

put on one of the mice, a little jacket on another, a pair of mouse eye glasses on the third. This was to identify them in the characters they were playing. And then, the mice would take over the show and give superb performances. The Letitia Puppets would be only minor characters over against the mice majors. There is a lot of ham in all mice, and there was inspired ham in these Duffey-infused creations/contrivances. The mice would speak their lines in voice roles that could be understood perfectly. This was either first or second or third degree magic. That the mice should talk indeed would be magic of the first degree. That the voices of Melchisedech or Letitia should talk through the mice was second or third degree magic. And the way that the mice followed voice commands and made the right motions in the puppet dramas, and struck the right attitudes, that was first degree magic.

The mice were good. The puppet plays were good. The children knew that it was all magic, and they were right. And when all the plays were finished, the mice would take off their attributes and bits of costume and set them in front of Letitia. Then, at the hand-clap command of Melchisedech, the mice would all jump off the table and scamper into the walls again, or into their places under the floors.

Duffey would end up the shows with a few tunes on his banjo. That also was magic, the noises he could get out of that little pluck-box.

The Duffeys had been giving a lot of shows in the parish schools. Then a lively little female teacher came and asked them to give a show in one of the public schools. This was the Gurdon S. Hubbard Elementary School, absolutely the newest school on the north side.

"It is so clean, it is so tight, it is so perfect, it is so new," the little teacher said, "and it would be so *right* if you would give one of your exquisite little shows for our children."

"A public school?" Duffey questioned. "But we are not sent except to the children of the House of Israel."

"Listen, you flaming Irishman," that little teacher said. "You have it all backwards. *We* are of the House of Israel. You aren't. Sixty-three percent of our students are of the House of Israel. You come."

The Duffeys came. And the show started off well enough, with Letitia putting her un-live puppets through some of their stringed antics, and with Melchisedech making his banjo produce noises that were very like the fanfare of trumpets. Then a malfunction developed.

They ran into a snag as they had never run into before. Duffey had dominion over mice, and he commanded seven of them to come out and perform. And they did not come. He commanded again. Nothing. There was no refusal. What was it then?

There were no mice.

"What is the matter, Melchisedech?" Letitia asked.

"What is the matter, Mr. Duffey," the lively little female teacher asked. "You seem very perturbed over something. What is the trouble?"

"No mice."

"But I have seen your act before. There are no mice, and then you call them out of the vasty void as you say."

"That is what I say for my patter, but I really call them out of the walls and out of the floor spaces and out of the crannies. I call them here, and there are none of them to come. In this brand new, squeaky-clean abomination there is not even one mouse, not one in the whole building."

"Oh, I am very proud of that," the little teacher said, "but I see the difficulty now. What is to be done?"

"Only prayer and fasting and virtual miracle will bring them when there are none," Duffey said. "I pray, I fast now for several minutes, but will they come? Open the auditorium doors and the corridor doors and the front and back door of the building. Then we will see."

"But we are very careful to keep the doors closed," the little teacher said, "or things might get in."

"I certainly hope that things will get in," Duffey said. Then he went into an intensity of concentration or prayer. The little teacher did have all the doors opened. And Letitia took Duffey's banjo and gave a little entertainment while they waited. She was good on the banjo, but she wasn't Duffey. There was some apprehension that not even the happy banjo-plucking could dispel. Five minutes went by, then seven, then nine.

Then there came into the room seven of the most out-of-breath mice you ever saw. They must have come from a long ways, more than a block, for they would never have lived anywhere in the area of the Gurdon S. Hubbard Elementary School. Those were tired and foot-sore mice. Mice usually don't travel very far in a hurry.

Duffey picked up the seven out-of-breath mice and put them on the table.

"Quick," he told Letitia, "make seven little mouse-sized oxygen masks. I will have to revive these little fellows." Letitia made the seven little masks and put them on the mice. "But we haven't any oxygen tank with fittings small enough for these masks," Letitia said. "And there aren't any fittings on the masks anyhow. They are only paper masks, and no oxygen to go with them."

"The mice think they are real," Duffey said. "So do I. There is real oxygen going to them now or I am a rodent's uncle. See, they revive. Why had you so little faith, Letitia?"

"I don't know," she said. "I should have learned by now to have faith."

The mice were revived and were bright-eyed and eager. They suffered their token costumes to be put on them, and they went into their roles with great verve. It was one of the best presentations the Duffeys ever gave.

But just what had happened?

"Those mice don't come from around here," said a zoology teacher, teacher of the class 'Our Happy World, Zoology for the Grade School Students' as it was listed in

the school prospectus. "And they don't come from a couple of blocks away either. These are Central American mice."

"We take what we can get," Melchisedech Duffey said.

Magic it had been, little touches of magic, bit handfuls of magic.

5

Shirley Israel (Damn that woman anyhow!) was at the heart of the rumor that there were salons around the near north side that were more witty and more informative than the salon of the Duffeys. Shirley's own salon was said to be one of them. The Israels and the McSorleys and the Calumets and the Hallahans and their crowd did not want to dump Duffey. They wanted to keep him. They were convinced, though they denied it, that there really was magic in him. They wanted to use him.

The stuff that was pushed in the more witty salons was dismal, but it stuck like cockleburs and it itched like nettles. It disturbed one. It caused swellings and sores and blood, and that was only the dragon-headed tip of the iceberg.

The whole complex, and the way it savaged Duffey, was so trashy that it will only be given in bare abridgement. Some of the persons who had sordid roles in this affair later repented of their parts. Others did not repent, either here or hereafter. They are still unrepentant in Hell to this day, and they have the reputations of being very bad actors there.

The aggressive element of the Red Decade itself (the 1930's) was strong in Chicago, but its mindset cut across all cities and persons. It was only one of the many heads of the old monster, not the largest nor the most fearsome head. But all of those heads are deadly. Most of the university people were besworn to the red thing, and most of the

newspaper people. But a person with a stout hide could repel most of the lances cast. So it went on for some years.

Casey Szymansky, the son of Duffey's old associate Gabriel and a talisman child of Melchisedech Duffey, had stopped attending colleges. The only thing that he brought out of his university experience was a small circulation magazine newspaper named *The Crock*. This magazine had some intellectual and cultural pretensions, and it was very opinionated. So the red rovers had tried to take it over.

They hadn't any handle to take hold of it by then, and Casey battled them, sometimes energetically, sometimes fitfully. But there was something fearsome in their persistence in trying to board and scuttle the sheet. The attempts were annoying in the way that a housefly is annoying. And then one noticed that the supposed housefly was another kind of flying creature, deadly, deadly. But things still went on for a while, and the deadly midges weren't able to harm the Casey.

There had been a little bit of world political unease in those years. One of its earlier climaxes came a short time after the close of the Red Decade, with the entry of the United States into the global war in December of 1941. Hardly anybody remembers this minor bit of history, but it did happen.

Casey joined the U.S. Army in April of 1942 and went away to the now forgotten war. He asked Duffey to run *The Crock* for him while he was in service, and Duffey did so. When Duffey had the magazine, there were many talented contributors, d'Alesandro the masterly engraver, Demetrio Glauch, Hermione Groben, Ethyl Ellenberger, Thos. J. Chronicker, S.J., Christopher Tompkinson, Mary Frances Rattigan (her translations were done under the name of Polly Polyglot), Mary Lightfoot, others. Some of these had contributed to the sheet when Casey had it, but now they

worked with more aim and direction. And others of them were brought in by Duffey.

The peculiar people still tried to take *The Crock* over, and Duffey laughed at them. This went on for several years. Then a man out of left field came to talk to Duffey. He had a portfolio. The man quickly told Duffey that it would do him no good to destroy the portfolio as there were only copies in it and the originals were in another place. He also devised that it would do no good for Duffey to destroy him, the man with the portfolio, as friends knew where he had gone, and they were standing by. In fact, the man said, if they did not hear from him by telephone every five minutes while he was in Duffey's place, they would break down the doors and come to the rescue.

This was a peculiar business. The man with the portfolio was larger than Duffey and no more than his age. Duffey was something of a battler, but he seldom assaulted visitors. Duffey threw open the door of his place and propped it open. The friends of the man wouldn't need to break down the doors to come in to the rescue. Then Duffey pulled his phone out of the phone jack and carried it to another room. Duffey had a nonstandard phone that coupled by a plug-in phone jack to the lines. This meant that the friends would not get any calls and that they would come in five minutes or so. Then Duffey took the portfolio away from the man and sat down to examine it.

It was mostly full of photographs. Duffey went through them with a sort of puzzled laughter. "Why?" he asked, "Why, who would be so interested in my private doings? I'm not that interesting a person." The puzzlement grew stronger and the laughter weaker. Duffey himself was in every one of the pictures, or at least (in the case of several of the dimmer ones) there was writing on the face of the photograph identifying Duffey as being in them. Some of the photographs had to be more than ten years old. "Why,

why?" Duffey asked Some of the pictures showed Duffey in middling compromising situations.

Many of the pictures were of Duffey and the various young girls carrying on upon that old black leather sofa in the bookstore. They showed him having dirty fun with Mary Frances Rattigan and Mary Catherine Carruthers, and Mary Jean, and Ethyl Ellenberger. It showed him playing the funny uncle with them from the time they were eight or ten years old.

"It had to be that little kid Hugo Stone," Duffey said. "He always had a camera with him, and he was always popping up in odd corners of the store. But how could he have known then, so long ago, that you could have use of these to blackmail me now?"

"Hugo was always a smart boy," the man said. "He is of my own kindred. He knew enough to accumulate and keep everything that might possibly be of future use."

There were later pictures of Duffey with grown women in various places, some of them in his very own rooms. Who had planted a camera in his own place? Who could come and go in the Duffey quarters? Only about two hundred persons, that's all. The pictures showed Duffey carrying on a little bit with Countess Margaret Hochfelsen and with that mendacious midget Charlotte Garfield. But it wasn't serious carrying on with those two. Others showed him playing the funny lover with Mona Greatheart and Shirley Israel and Josephine McSorley and Catherine Quick and Elena O'Higgins and Beverly Boyd and Mary Lightfoot and Jenny Reid. And yet, there wasn't anything so very outrageous about any of them either. "Who was the assiduous cameraman of these," Duffey said. "They are taken in a dozen places. Who has been so busy with this hobby?"

And one of the pictures showed (Oh, no, no, no, that wasn't at all what it seemed to be: why cannot a photograph show what is all in fun and what isn't?) Duffey entangled in a very funny manner of loving with his sister-in-law Lily

Koch. The only *flagrante* picture in the whole portfolio was of Duffey and Shirley Israel. And that was an entrapment, a badger game trick, a sneak attack. But several of the others had a little bit of heat in them and they did not seem to have any innocent explanations.

"Well, what are you going to do with them?" Duffey asked stiffly.

"Oh, we hope that we will not do anything with them," the man said. "It is just that some of us want to join with you in the excellent little magazine you are running, and you have not welcomed us with open arms. We do not want to join in from hope of money gain. We will bring in money, not take it out. And we will enlarge the magazine. But it is an idea magazine, and we want our ideas to be in it."

"Who are you going to blackmail me to?"

"Oh, to your wife, and to others."

"You're wasting your time," Duffey said. "My wife can read my mind. She knows the things I have done. These things cannot be held against me, however they may look. I have confessed the few guilty things among them and I have been absolved of them. And any guilt I ever had in them, either in fact or in appearance, is gone now. It is all past."

"Some of these pictures, you must know, are not too old."

"Some of my confessings and absolvings are not too old either."

"Ah, but will your wife absolve you?"

"Certainly she will. I will explain to her that I am clear of all these things now, and that she must hold me clear of them. But she already knows this. I am, in fact, a changed man for some two years now."

"Changed man, you had not yet changed when these pictures were taken. And I will bet that your wife takes a very unchanged view of them when she sees them."

The friends of the portfolio man came in then. They had not got a call from him, and they came to see whether he

and Duffey had proceeded to violence. Rollo McSorley and Elmo Sheehan were among those friends, and several others who were still half-friends of Duffey.

"Get out, all of you," Duffey said. "I'll not be blackmailed."

"Then your wife will see some of these pictures this evening," the portfolio man said.

"Why won't she see all of them?" Duffey asked. "Show all of them to her at once. Why not?"

"Oh, we will keep some of them still hanging over you," the man said. "It is more effective that way. Besides, I haven't even brought all of them in. There will always be others, until you cooperate."

"Out, all of you," Duffey ordered.

"There are sterner measures that we can take also," said one of the half-friends.

"You mean the three preternatural slant-faced killers?" Duffey asked. "I wonder, do you carry spares for them?"

"Spare?"

"Yes. At least one of them will be killed at our next encounter. I thought you might want to keep the number at three. Out, all of you, out!"

"You'll be sorry, Duff," Rollo McSorley warned.

"Of course I will be. I'll become a man of sorrows for a while. But I'll not let your camel's nose into the tent that is *The Crock*. And I'll not do worse things than I have been pictured as doing."

When Duffey got all of them out of there, he went for a walk. This thing was an irksome threat over him, but something was also threatening to destroy a shadow of his. To a primitive, and Duffey was always that, the destruction of a shadow is a mortal wounding of the Self.

Duffey had his shadows, and they were fleshed much of the time, or he believed that they were. He had shadows, he had fetches, he had doubles of himself. One of these

doubles, who was often in a shabby sort of empathy with Duffey, lived there in Chicago. He lived only about six blocks from Duffey, but in a poorer neighborhood. And he was a poor man.

Duffey went to that house to talk to the overwhelmed man. There was nobody at the house. Then Duffey, following an intuitive path as a hound dog might, came to a shabby north end tavern and was called 'McFadden's North End Tavern'. He went in and found a despondent man who looked slightly like himself.

The man was sitting alone at a table with a half-full glass of beer in front of him. He was maybe forty years old, with short-cut hair between the colors of sandy and orange. His eyes were fire-blue, but the fire in them was tired this afternoon. His hands were always busy. They were weaving patterns in the air, and banging into each other with little jolting claps.

"Of this I am entirely innocent," the man was muttering. "I haven't done these things, and yet witnesses have seen me coming and going about them. I don't understand it at all. I am an innocent man and I don't want to understand it."

Duffey shivered, for the man's voice was quite like his own.

"You are half-shaded over," Duffy told the man. "So am I. Together we can form a window to let a little light in."

"No," the man said, but he didn't look at Duffey. "You're a devil. You bugged me once before, several years ago, or a man very like you did. There is something wrong about you. Do *not* sit down, I'm telling you, fellow!" And the man banged his hands together loudly and nervously. But Duffey was already sitting down at the table with him.

"I *will* sit here, man," Duffey said, "and I will talk to you. You owe me an explanation, though neither of us can say why." The man looked at Duffey angrily.

"A pitcher here, young McFadden," Duffey called then. It was one of those seventy-two ounce pitchers that young

McFadden brought, and a glass for Duffey and a fresh glass for the other man. "And onions and other things," Duffey ordered of McFadden.

"You are sure that you are innocent of it all?" Duffey asked his tablemate then. "How have witnesses seen you going and coming about things if you are innocent of them?"

"It's as if there were a devil associated with me and the devil had done the things and they were reported of me," the man said. "But my wife believes the reports. This is the blow. Why have you broken off that layer of onion and cast it aside? Have a care what you do there. Isn't that layer as good as the rest of the onion?"

"The onion?" Duffey asked "Why, I wasn't noticing. I eat it a bit, then I open it up a bit, and I toy with it. You were saying that there were things about your own conduct that you don't understand, and—"

"I was saying that you cast one layer of the onion aside as if it weren't as good as the rest. Do you believe that I'm only an onion layer to you? Do you believe that I'm an inferior layer to be cast off like nothing? Well, we may go to fist bailiwick to decide which of us is the onion and which of us is the layer. I am a tornado, and you are one of my spinoffs, that's what you are, man. Oh, the other thing, as regards my wife and our relationship. I have never done one wrong thing, not one. And now I have. This afternoon I have."

"What have you done this afternoon. And what is your name?" Duffey asked.

"Mike. Mike Melchiades, that is."

"What did you mean when you said that you had never done one wrong thing as regards your wife, but now you had?" Duffey asked.

"When she left me, I immediately went down and pulled everything out of our joint account. It wasn't much, a little over three hundred dollars. And she had probably put more

into it than I had. But I was back in our rooms thirty minutes later and I got a call from the bank. My wife was there and wanting to make a twenty dollar withdrawal. I said no. I could hear her crying near the other end of the line, but I said no again. What will she do with no money at all, and her on the town with just a little suitcase? She is shy. She doesn't know how to make out. And she is broken up in the false belief that I am untrue to her. Poor people have a hard time of it. Getting mad and pulling out are luxuries that they can never really afford. A man is like an onion there, fellow, yes. He has layers to him, and the layer doesn't care to be discarded like that. You think I'm only a layer of it. You're wrong. I'm not that. Leave me here, Devil. But if you should happen to see my wife — Oh, but you wouldn't know my wife if you saw her — ”

“I would know her,” Duffey said.

“Tell her to come home,” the man said. “Tell her that this thing is not really broken off between us.”

Duffey went out of McFaddens and walked. He suspected that the man was right. The man was the tornado, and Duffey was only a spinoff from him. Or that was the way it was part of the time. Poor people, ignorant people, low class people often have tremendous psychic power. They are tornados indeed; blind tornados. They generate terrible power, and richer people steal it from them and use it themselves.

Duffey knew that the Chicago interlude was about finished, and it had been a tolerably bright complexity of awareness and styles and livings and enjoyments and arts and immediacies. He was not overly proud, but he knew that his own dimming out from this scene would dim it a little bit for everyone there. Melchisedech and Letitia had designed their own part of Chicago as they had designed other things, other events, life scenarios, and other persons themselves.

Now, as they would soon be leaving the city, one way or another, all those things would become undesigned again.

Duffey walked by the Pont du Sable Traffic Trestle that had become interior to him, a universal bridge. Several cars had just accomplished a real-life crash against some of its abutments. That meant that another part of Duffey was crippled.

"Mike!" a woman cried. "Oh, Mike!" Then she stopped confused. "I thought you were my Mike," she said.

"Go home to him," Duffey told her. "It was all a misunderstanding. He hadn't abused your relationship at all, and now he is sorry that he closed out the account."

"Somehow I couldn't possibly face him before tomorrow," the woman said, "and there isn't any place that I could go."

"There are rooms on the other end of the block," Duffey said, "and low-cost eating places. You can make it till tomorrow easily."

Duffey gave her twenty dollars.

"But I couldn't take money from a man in the street," the woman said.

"Be quiet, woman," Duffey told her. "It is given to you. It is not yours to ask whether you will take it. Take it and go somewhere. And tomorrow go home. And do not wonder too much about the congruence of events."

Duffey knew then that Letitia was gone, or was going from their place at that very moment. He knew that she had divined much of what had happened, though she had not yet been approached by the man with the portfolio. She didn't want to see what it all was, and she wouldn't. But she had gone away for a while. She would have supplied, though, a good cover story for her going away, an account of a very necessary trip. What else would a priceless wife, who reads her husband's brain and heart, do?

About a month after this, there was a little meeting of the stockholders of the *Crock*. Duffey himself had a big piece of the stock of the magazine, and he had been in nice control of it all with Casey's proxy votes. But now a strange man presented a dated and signed proxy from Casey Szymansky who was still across the APO Oceans. And this proxy preempted the earlier proxy that Casey had given to Duffey before he went overseas.

The money involved, the stock involved, the equipment involved were none of them very much. The *Crock* was capitalized for only five thousand dollars; and Duffey, even though he had lost part of his facility for making and handling money, could have covered that quite a few times. But there wouldn't be any buying out. The strange man and his group took over the *Crock* and they changed its orientation.

Of course, Letitia Duffey had returned from her necessary trip before this. She still did not see the portfolio or the material in it, and she was without any interest in it. And the group had already forced Duffey out of the way on this deal. Well, there would be other deals. They would keep the portfolio of pictures, and perhaps they could find use for them some day.

It was about a year or fourteen months after the taking over of the *Crock* that Casey Szymansky came home. He confirmed that the orientation of the *Crock* had changed, that he himself would be running it again with help and suggestions from the 'group', and that Duffey was severed from it forever.

Casey said that every damned thing in the world had changed for him now. He said that he had traded souls either with the devil or with a virtual devil, and that he would maintain an entirely different way in the world

thenceforth. And Duffey understood just what he was up to and how big the change in him really was.

But it couldn't be a total break between Casey and Duffey even then. Casey was one of the Duffey creatures, and Duffey couldn't repent of having made him. But Casey had grown larger than Duffey and more contrary. The Casey moon had grown bigger and heavier than the Duffey planet, and that had set up one hell of an eccentric. The whole business of Casey Szymansky must be investigated in depth pretty soon.

Melchisedech Duffey, in his 'time of trial' here, had sustenance from his quasi-brother Bascom Bagby in St. Louis. Duffey received weekly letters from Bagby. He had also received weekly letters from Bagby during his seven hidden years (there was something inexplicable about that part of it). The letters were of great intelligence and compassion. They were written in a good hand on old lined tablet paper. These letters seemed to be a part of Duffey's introspection, but they were real enough and exterior enough. And now, Bagby understood the situation without Duffey ever mentioning it to him.

"It is the revolt of the Titan is it, the first of them to revolt and attempt to overturn you? And this phase of it has been successful for him. He has thrown you out of your Chicago Olympia, and now you must descend into the world or else seek another mountaintop. 'It is probably for the best,' as the man said when he had lost both arms and legs and been blinded in an accident, 'it will keep me home nights and out of trouble'. You will be coming here very soon now. You will be meeting most of the rest of this titan race that you created in moments of abstraction or absentmindedness. We never will know what you were thinking when you did it. Most of them will like you though. I will see you in St. Louis in about thirteen days. Oh, you didn't know you were coming here then? You are."

As it had been both fashionable and expensive, during the Chicago interlude, to be analyzed, Melchisedech had been analyzed by Doctor Saul Rafelson. Duffey never was released as cured by Rafelson (or Doctor Raffles, as both Melchisedech and Letitia called him). The doctor went so far as to say that there never was any such thing as a cure in these matters. This was at variance with the stated opinions of most of the other psychoanalysts.

Here are a few notes, though, that Doctor Rafelson made on the case of Melchisedech Duffey:

"The types of Duffey's fantasies are not extraordinary. They are the 'Child of God', 'Child of Gold', 'Master of Ebony Slaves', 'Master of Giants', 'The Riding King', 'The Boy King', 'The Miracle Worker', 'I am many thousands of years old', 'Successive Lives', 'Parallel Lives', 'The many-layered myself', 'The monster within', 'Living shadows of myself', 'My power to confer power', 'My power to make people', 'The company of the elites', 'The conferring of talismans and lives', and the 'But for my intervention, the world would be in deadly peril' fantasy. Who has not had all these fantasies? They are the things that are entertained by every boy of unhealthy mind.

"In only one way was Duffey out of the ordinary in his relationship to his own fantasies: He was able to articulate them exteriorly. Or to put it in layman's words, 'He makes them happen!' I have to accept this as fact. I have encountered the same thing in two other patients in past years, but not nearly so powerfully as in Duffey. Duffey believes that there are other aspects and persons of himself: and so, in consequence, there are. These may be psychic projections, or they may be the real persons captured by Duffey as satellites, possibly never having seen him. Or they may be valid and living images that have split off from him for independent existence. This was the 'Splitting Image' of popular lore. I have examined two of these freestanding

images of Duffey and had them under analysis. There was no doubt that they are flesh and blood (one of them has a citation for his faithfulness as a blood donor). They are young people far above the average in mentality and body. Duffey may have wrought better in them than he has been wrought in himself.

“Duffey believes that he has made twelve of these young people (twelve was the most frequent ‘works and days’ number). These are not the same as Duffey’s ‘shadows’. Duffey must have intended these twelve independent satellites to express twelve aspects of himself. Yes, his egomania is monumental.

“Duffey believes that he is a magician and sorcerer. Of course he is. There are a lot of them active in the world, and the world does not seem to be too much the worse for it.

“Duffey was one of those rare persons who might be able to impose topological inversion on the world. This was possible both mathematically and psychically. This would be bringing about the case that the world was contained in Duffey and not Duffey in the world. Many of us in this discipline have known about such possibilities, and we have even recognized several momentary happenings of it. We call it the case of the world spending three days in the belly of Jonah, though there has never been anything like a three-day period. (In the year 1848, the whole world was contained within a young goat herder in Anatolia for twelve minutes, but mostly it was only three or four seconds on even a major inversion.) The thing may even have happened, for very brief periods, in the case of Duffey.

“Yes, Duffey believes that he molds and even creates persons. This is part of his talisman-conferring and life-conferring fantasies, but still there is slippery fact to it. It really seems as though a group of Duffey’s contingent creations were presently rushing towards congruent fulfillment. If this happens, if they get to know each other in their fullness, then these contingent creations will be living

persons in life situations, and they will have been so all along. If this blows up, then they will not be, and they will not have been. If they are, then the world will have to accommodate and provide antecedents and contexts for them. This will require a terrific amount of ingenious and preternatural plot construction on the part of someone.

"I have told Duffey that he must get rid of the unrealities that surround and infest him. But a peculiarity of his unrealities is that they are solid and bodied. Duffey may well be murdered by a group of three of his unrealities. They've tried it before.

"I have been asked several times by professional colleagues to make a statement about the Duffey phenomena. They all know about them, but how could they have any except intuitive knowledge about them? How do they know that there *are* Duffey phenomena, and how could they have known that I might have entrée to this knowledge? All right, this is a statement:

"We cannot leave this phenomena out of account or all our psychological statements will be worthless. No study of human inter-reactions, of human relations to the exocosmos, of the variable human functions of the creator-created roles, of the overlapping of the human persons in individuals and groups, of the sharing of 'persons' by individuals and groups, of the gaining and losing of reality by phenomenal persons, no such investigations can be complete if they omit evidence of the prototypical Duffey matter. It will lead right to the heart of the meaning of matter itself. It will lead there, but I will not follow it there. I'm spooked."

Doctor Saul Rafelson

Book 5

'There be two men of all mankind
That I'm forever thinking on:
They chase me everywhere I go
— Melchisedech, Ukalegon.'

[Edwin Arlington Robinson, *Two Men*]

Well, who was Ukalegon? Skalsky says that Ukalegon was a woman and no man at all; and that she was, in all ways, the negation of Melchisedech. But did the poet E. A. Robinson understand that?

In the year 1946, Duffey started off on a week's trip from which, as it would happen, he would never return.

Now it was the case that Casey Szymansky, who had moved the *Crock* out of Duffey's place to more plush quarters, said that he was going on a trip the same day. Neither told the other any more about it. They were on tolerable terms with each other by then, but not on really good terms. There had been quite a bit of property and money coming to Duffey out of his partnership with Gabriel Szymansky after Gabriel's death. Duffey hadn't taken all that he was entitled to, but he had taken more than Casey thought he should have. And Duffey now owned that particular building, the building on the poor street that had once housed Gabriel's pawn shop.

"Yes, all agreements and papers are in order, Duffey, and they show such things as belonging to you," Casey and his lawyer had said, "but we don't believe the faces of those papers." But they had settled it without excess bitterness, Duffey taking a little shorter stick than he should have had.

This day, they left Chicago on the same train and on the same coach, though they had not been seeking each others' company. It wasn't really embarrassing, but it might have been just a little stuffy. It was always a problem how an Olympian should handle a Titan who was in open rebellion.

"I'm sorry about your nose, Duffey," Casey said as they sat together.

"Oh, that's all right," Duffey told him. It was the first time they had mentioned it since it had happened. Duffey had had his nose broken (it wasn't the last time it would happen) in an altercation with goons of the new people who were associated with Casey on the *Crock*. New people they were, but with old goons. The goons had been the same old slant-faced men out of Duffey's unrealities. Well, did they keep spares for them? Duffey had done in one of those slant-faces as a follow-up of the altercation, and he hadn't heard from them since.

And there was something else about this trip. Mary Catherine Carruthers was on the same train. She had come to the train with Casey, but they had gone to different coaches, apparently by agreement. Both Casey and Mary Catherine were plainly startled at seeing Duffey taking the same train, though Mary Catherine continued always in her total fondness for Duffey. Casey and Mary Catherine were engaged to be married at this time, as they had been engaged several times before. But they did not ride in the same coach.

It was a daytime journey with an early leaving. Duffey and Casey, as if by silent agreement, stayed away from controversial subjects. They talked intelligently of the mathematics of probability.

"I am bothered by an impossible aggregation of coincidences," Duffey said. "There are things that are bound to come together in a fantastic congruence, or they will make liars out of all sorts of implicit pledges. And yet the improbability of their coming together is so extreme that

there was not room enough on earth to write the number of that improbability."

"Can you put the aggregation into mathematical form, Duffey?" Casey asked him. "You have the irritating habit of trying to express things in words that should be expressed only in mathematical formulae. There are some problems of contingent philosophy that cannot be phrased except in mathematical form."

"Oh, I believe that every problem can be expressed in straightforward verbal form, Casey," Duffey said. "But this one would sound so silly in the expressing."

"Many mathematical expressions are absolutely silly," Casey said. "But I'll try not to guffaw at your straightforward verbalisms, though sometimes it's hellish hard to refrain."

"Well, I made a few people, Casey," Duffey said. "That was the beginning of it. I made them with no forethought at all. But it seems to be a requirement that these people should come together. It is working almost like a chemical affinity to coagulate. But it's very unlikely that a dozen people I made, out of all the people in the world, should come together by chance. I figure that things are being stretched unlawfully, but I don't quite know what my responsibility is in the situation."

"You — made — a — few — people? Was that what you said, Duffey?"

"That's right, Casey. Wasn't that acceptable to you?"

"Oh, I suppose so. Are these the first people that you ever made?"

"Yes. These, in my present life, are the only people that I have made, so far as I remember. There are twelve of them if I count them right. Twelve of them, and another who isn't counted in the count, and several more of mixed statue."

"You're sure that you really did it, Duffey? You're not just dreaming it?"

"I'm sure that I had a lot to do with their forming. Something, but not everything. Yes, I made them, literally

and really.”

“Oh, how have they turned out, Duffey?”

“The results aren't all in. In twelve, there should be one Judas. I don't know which. Oh, you're one of the people I made, Casey.”

“Oh? That might explain a few scraps of problems. Just how did you make me, Duffey. And don't turn it into a dirty joke.”

“I made you by a talisman given to your father in a chance encounter several years before your birth.”

“Oh that thing! I have been going to throw it away several times, but it was such a curious piece of anti-art. I'm told that I held onto it from my birth till I was six months old and would not be separated from it at all. I found that it's made of solid gold. It's fairly valuable for that, but not as a piece of anti-art. Yes, it's real gold.”

“Should I use false gold? Don't throw it away, Casey. Your soul may be in it.”

“If my soul was in it once, it isn't there now. I've recently traded souls with another person. Did you make anyone else that I know?”

“Yes. One other certainly. Two others likely. And I've a feeling that there are many acquaintances among members of the group that I don't know about at all. Ah, I don't know just where you're going, Casey, but you may meet all the others this week. I have the feeling that you creatures have somehow decided to hold a conclave independently of your maker, me. But how can you know where to find each other?”

“I don't know, Duffey. I sure don't know where to find any others of your making, though I bet I'd recognize them as yours.”

“Yes, you will probably all recognize each other at sight. And I believe that I will always know my own creatures when I come on them.”

They drifted apart and fell into conversations with different sets of people in the coach and did not talk to each other again during the trip. They arrived in St. Louis in the early evening. Duffey and Casey and Mary Catherine Carruthers all seemed to be leaving the train there.

"Whatever are they going to be doing in St. Louis?" Duffey muttered about the other two. "And whatever am I going to be doing here myself?"

A young lady at a newsstand in the train station was singing some gibberish as she opened bundles of evening papers.

"Kerowl, kerowl! the dogs do growl.
The Duffeys have come to town!"

"Did you say Duffeys, young lady?" Melchisedech Duffey asked her.

"Yah, Duffeys. There's a bunch of them in town. You should see them, you *will* see them. They're everywhere. They're wilder than beggars. They're showier than Gypsies. Oh, they are something."

"Just exactly where in town are these 'Duffeys' to be found?"

"Exactly everywhere," the young lady said. "They're everywhere."

It puzzled Duffey who these Duffeys might be. But if they were everywhere in town, he would see them. Well, what was he doing here? Duffey could always find excuses to come to St. Louis. He had business interests there. He had two partners there, Bagby and Charley Murray. He had a sister there. He still owned part of the famous Rounders' Club there. But he hadn't come to St. Louis for any of these reasons. He had come because he had received a letter in Chicago, postmarked Morgan City, Louisiana, and it had read:

“I’ll be in St. Louis on or about the last Saturday in May. I will see you there then and give you your assignment for the rest of your life. Henri Salvatore.”

The name Henri Salvatore was not familiar to Duffey, but something there was familiar. This Henri or Henry was one of Duffey's own creations, from a talisman given, many years before, to a Cajun riverman. This Cajun, probably a maternal uncle (since his forgotten surname was definitely not Salvatore) had surely conferred that talisman for the birthing of this person who had written the letter. Yes, Duffey would recognize one of his creations anywhere, even by a letter written by one of them. But why should a creature be able to give a life assignment to his own creator? And was it in St. Louis that the talismanic children were going to have their conclave independently of their creator? Why then was their creator invited to town by one of them?

Duffey and Casey and Mary Catherine left the station area in three different taxi cabs, and they went down three different streets. So much for that. Duffey took his taxi to the home of one of his partners, Charley Murray.

But the cabs of Duffey and Casey arrived, from opposite directions, in front of the Murray residence, at the same time. Once again, it was a thing that could get a little bit stuffy.

“I go in here, Casey,” Duffey said with just a little bit of irritation, “An old friend and partner of mine lives here. “

“I go in here also,” Casey said, a little bit puzzled. “This was the address that I have. You had better check your address. Mine checks.”

Oh, it was explained all right, after a little while, inasmuch as such almost-embarrassing things are ever explained. Charley Murray greeted Duffey as his oldest and best friend, as he was. And Charley knew who Casey was and had been expecting him.

“I meant to phone you, Duffey, and tell you that this young Casey was coming down from Chicago to St. Louis at

about the same time you were," Charley Murray said. "I thought it would be nice if there were some way you could recognize each other in case you traveled on the same train. I was wondering how I could describe you to each other so you could make yourselves known, but this was a little bit difficult considering that I had never seen Casey."

"You described us both marvelously, even though at a distance, even though you were not conscious that you were doing it," Duffey said. "The mind of man was a wonderful thing. Though you had never seen Casey, I recognized him instantly from your description."

"You are, as always, a crooked-tongued fraud, Melchisedech," Charley said. "You two met on the train, did you? Casey has come to town for the wedding of an army friend of his, a nephew of mine. We weren't sure how much room there would be for out-of-town guests over at the Stranahans, so Casey was here on a possible overflow basis. And he is welcome here, and there, and everywhere."

Well, that was all right, that was fine, that was as good an explanation as any. Duffey's breath ran a little short when he heard part of it, of course, but we all have shortages of breath sometimes. Duffey knew a man named Stranahan here in St. Louis, a Patrick Stranahan who used to come into the Rounders' Club, a man who was very close to this Charley Murray, and a fairly close friend of Duffey himself. And Duffey, once on an evening of mellow exuberance, had given a gift to this Patrick Stranahan.

It would be fine here, but a little bit nervous and testy. Duffey rather wished that he had gone to stay with his sister and her husband Bagby. He was astonished now that he hadn't even thought of that, since he almost always stayed with them when he was in St. Louis.

"But would the mysterious Henri Salvatore be able to find me at the Bagbys?" Duffey asked himself now. "Well, will he be able to find me at the Murrays? Why did I think that he

would have a better shot at me here? He didn't say where to be in St. Louis, and this is a fair-sized city."

About twenty minutes later, there was a car and a voice outside, both of them calling out for Casey. But Duffey got another one of his shocks from that. He knew that voice, and yet he knew that he had not ever heard it before. He knew it because he had made it. It was the voice of one of his creatures. But the voice and the car went away with Casey, and Duffey forbore to look out.

Duffey phoned his sister. Then he went over to the Bagbys. Murray said that they would all meet over at the Rounders' Club later. Duffey spent several hours with the Bagbys. His sister had always been very close to him, even when he didn't see her for years at a time. But how had Bagby become so close? This was the one friend on earth who would do anything for him. Duffey and Bagby seemed to have an infinite number of points of contact.

Later, Duffey and the Bagbys picked up Beth Keegan, Duffey's old St. Louis girl, and her husband to go to the Rounders'. Beth was named Erlenbaum now.

"Kerowl, kerowl! the dogs do growl. The Duffeys have come to town!" Beth chanted when she saw him.

"Where has this doggerel come from, Beth?" Duffey asked her. "What Duffeys? I have heard this chant before since I have been in town."

"Oh, the Duffeys, the Duffeys, the bright and shining Duffeys! They are all over town, as lively as a dog blanket full of fleas. You aren't in with these new Duffeys, Melchisedech. You just haven't their class or color. You'll see them, you'll see them. There was no way of avoiding them."

"Whence have they their name?" Duffey asked, a little bit bewildered.

"Oh, from you ultimately, I suppose," Beth said. "They're creatures of yours, and you are their architect. But I'm afraid they got a little bit out of hand. You used too much color when you made them, Melchisedech. You used too much

noise. You were working in an unaccustomed medium, I suppose, but they're badly overdone. Everybody in town loves them. They'd better."

Duffey's sister Mary Louise looked wonderful, but even she was a little bit overdone. But Bascom Bagby, the baroque, the flawed pearl, the husband of Mary Louise, the brother-in-law of Duffey, though he also was a little bit overdone, did not look wonderful. He looked too old for his chronological age. He looked sick. But he looked more than ever like Duffey. He had lost some of his bluffery and he seemed very glad to see Duffey, "probably for the last time", as he said. But he was still a powerful and humorously rough-looking man, with beetling brows and a beetling belly.

"He is my dark object," Duffey said as he had said before. "He is my uncleansed stables, he is another part of myself, and I sincerely love the low freak of a man. He is closer to me than kindred."

"Yes, there are odd things happening in town," sister Mary Louise said. "The 'Duffeys' have come to town. The beggars aren't in it with the 'Duffeys'. I love you with your nose in a sling."

"What Duffeys have come to town?" Melchisedech asked her as he had asked Beth. "Who are they?"

"If you don't know them, then nobody does," Mary Louise said. "There has never been so fired-up a band of Gypsies as these Duffeys."

Abd Beth chimed in again. "Oh, there's no question about who they are," she said. "They're *you*. They're you if you were multiplied ten or eleven times, if you were better looking and smarter than you really are, if you were more colorful, if you were wittier, if you were more magnetic. They are you exactly, with ten thousand superior things added to each of them."

Beth's little girls had long since become big girls. Beth was a grandmother now, but she was still a piece of cool, ivory statuary that laughed. "I know, Melky, every time that I

see one of them (and I've been seeing them yesterday and today everywhere) that you thought him up, or her. If I wanted to make people, how would I start, Duffey? I bet mine wouldn't be as sprawling or overdone as yours are. We will see some of your creatures tonight. Wherever we go, some of them will be there. What are they doing in St. Louis? I also love you with your nose in that sling."

"I believe that the creatures are holding some sort of conclave in this town this week," Duffey said, "but I didn't authorize it."

"You had better authorize it, Duffey," Erlenbaum, Beth's husband, said with a mountainous grin. Erlenbaum sometimes kneaded huge fists and grinned loweringly at Duffey, and Duffey pushed him away by taking friendly liberties upon the lap and bosom of Beth while grinning back at him. "If you can't whip them, Duffey, and you can't, then you'd better join them. If they were yours once, they're not now. Any of them would take you around on a leash like a little dog."

Duffey and the Bagbys and the Erlenbaums arrived at Rounders' Club. Most times, when Duffey would come into Rounders', whether he had been gone for an hour or for three years, a band or orchestra or combo would strike up 'The King Shall Ride'. For Duffey was still King at the Rounders' Club. But now he was not noticed when he came in. There were other attractions there.

There was the picture of the 'Severed Giant Hands' up over the doorway that led to the Elegant Riverboat Deck. These 'Severed Giant Hands' were an old dream of Duffey's. Now it was the case that Duffey felt his own hands to be severed and deprived of further creative functions when he came into the presence of several of his own creations.

How had he ever done them? And how had they gone so far beyond everything that he had any knowledge of? There were several of the Duffeys-come-to-town present. They

were brilliant, bedazzled, larger than life, overwhelming, loud, grotesquely super-intelligent, laughing, shouting, pleasant, pleasant, pleasant. They had very light ways for their very great masses. It was as if they had just come from other gravities and other worlds. Duffey might as well be invisible, for all that anybody would give him a look when the more flamboyant 'Duffeys' were there.

Then the vane swung around and Duffey became visible once more. "Oh, it was Duffey himself!" a female of the incredible species cried out. She was the most gentle of the 'Duffeys' and she came to Melchisedech Duffey in a great sweep. The colors of these creatures! In what store could you find pigments for such colors?

"Oh, you came to us like a ghost, and we hardly knew you," this gentle one said, but the chandeliers quivered a bit from the sound of her gentle voice. "It's as though you were hidden in a cloud or in a burning tree," she said. "And then you must remember that most of us have never seen you before, and we have never heard your voice.

"Oh, bring bread and wine, people! This is the Duffey himself, the Melchisedech. Ah, but we do love you with your nose in a sling. That shall be one of your attributes when you are sung in epics! We wouldn't have you any other way. We were wondering what you could do special for your apparition."

Duffey had to rub his eyes with his fists. It was as it had been when he was the Boy King back in his first childhood and he had made some sun-squirrels. He had not been able to look at them. He had to look away and rub his eyes. "But you made them," one of the seneschals had chided him, "why can you not look at them?"

"I didn't know they would be so bright when the light went on inside them," young King Melchisedech had said. And these his present animations, Duffey sure hadn't realized that they would be this bright when the light was turned on inside them.

This first of them who had seen him here, this most gentle of the ultra-people, was named Mary Virginia Schaeffer, and she was from Galveston. Duffey knew her by this identity, just as she knew him as Duffey.

Some of the others came to meet him. They were overpowering, but there was something lacking out of the middle of them. Duffey exulted in the company of these finest of all creatures for a half hour or so, and then he came back to his objection.

"My central creation is not here," Duffey said accusingly.

"Oh, Finnegan, he'll be here tomorrow," a big-brained, grinning young man of this special people swore. "No, Finnegan isn't here yet tonight. He was the salt of our lives, and we are saltless without him. But not quite saltless, Duffey, when you are here."

But there was some oddity in what they knew Duffey by. They knew him as the editor, now the former editor, of the *Crock*. It had been a cult sheet with them. They had reveled in the intelligence of it, in the humor of it, in the Duffiness of it. But they had only wispy and intuitive knowledge of Melchisedech in his royal aspect.

The special people who were there, dining and roistering at Rounders', were John Schultz (who was Hans) (who was the big-brained grinning young man), and Marie Monaghan who was his wife from Australia.

And Dorothy Yekouris from New Orleans, and Henri Salvatore from Morgan City, Louisiana (Oh, oh, he will give you your rest-of-your-life scenario, Duffey), and Mary Virginia Schaeffer from Galveston. And Absalom Stein from Chicago (Duffey already knew him a little bit, but he had never realized what a magnificent person he was, and he had never been absolutely sure that he was one of his creations). Six of the high twelve were here present. And Duffey had traveled from Chicago on the train with two others of them that day, but from long acquaintanceship with them he did

not always notice just how magic-imbued they really were. Casey Szymansky and Mary Catherine Carruthers also belonged to these special creatures, but Duffey had seen them almost daily from their childhoods.

But here about him now were five of his creatures that Duffey had never seen before, and a sixth one whom he had never seen with open eyes before. Since when had a sixth one become Absalom Stein? Hadn't he used to be somebody more grubby?

Oh, there were the old 'Unreality Fringes' about all of the magnificent animations. And yet they were real. That sort of smokey halo that they all had, it was called the 'unreality fringe' in the lingo of sorcerers. But these persons were real.

The people at the Rounders' Club had discovered that Duffey was in their midst now. For a while there, this artist had been in the dark shadow of his own animated art. He had been dwarfed by it. Now it was recognized that these special people had all been made by Duffey, that they were among his easy masterpieces. A little combo there played 'The King Shall Ride'. And then it played the rousing 'Gadarene Swine Song.' Olga Sanchez of the torchy shoulders still worked there. She came and caressed him, as others did. Duffey was back in his legendary fiefdom.

Duffey had a whole riot of mixed feelings about this colorful sprawl of youngish people that he had created. Each one of them was clearly an expression of his art at its best, but maybe they expressed him a little too strongly. Oh, they were all brainy and brawny and brilliant, but it may be that they were somewhat excessive in all of it. Was this flamboyance in the right line of real art? Maybe. These special people were arts and statuaries of Duffey, were they not? They even conceded that they were.

"Duffey misunderstands his own processes," Marie Monaghan Schultz said. "He does not make us. He collects us and gives us our settings and our sparkle. He found our souls hidden away and forgotten in old junk stories. He

bought us all for a song. I think it was the 'Gadarene Swine Song' he bought us for. And now he puts us on display. We were all in *Razzle Daz* and when you have been in *Razzle Daz*, you can't get any higher than that."

Duffey gaped almost without understanding her. He had difficulty remembering, with all this light shining in his eyes and in his ears. But *Razzle Daz* had been a little comic strip he drew for the *Crock*. He had done it with unused parts of his mind and with unbusy moments of his hands, but many persons had thought that it was absolutely the best thing in the *Crock*, which Duffey had never quite understood. And, yes, of course, these splendid animations had been the models for the characters in *Razzle Daz*. Those characters had even gone by the nicknames of some of the splendid animations, 'Finnegan' for instance, and 'Hans', and 'Show Boat'.

"Duffey collects works of art," Marie Monaghan went on, "and we are all of us works of art."

"You are wrong, Marie," Duffey insisted. "I *do* make you. But I haven't collected you, and I don't know how you have collected yourselves in this town. I did not give you your settings and sparkle quite as you have them now. I think you're a little overdone. You may have to be changed."

"You will change us at your peril, grubby sorcerer," Dotty Yekouris told him. "We like us just the way we are, and we like you the way you are. Oh, may your nose never heal!"

But if Duffey had made these people, and of course he had, how did their excellence become independent of his? Their wit was too fast for him to keep up with, and all their jokes were obsoleted by new jokes every minute. When had Duffey's mind ever worked so fast as did the minds of these creatures of his?

"I knew that you would be exactly like this," Mary Virginia said. "Banging your hands together as you do! It's as though you still had a 'maker's mallet' in your hands!"

She kissed him with that transcendent way she would always have. Yes, he'd made them with a 'maker's mallet'. He remembered that part of it now.

But these people were all just a little bit larger than life, and maybe they were too large. Henri Salvatore, the Fat Frenchman, was tremendous. And Hans Schultz was at least enormous. And Absalom Stein, was he really that big? But Duffey hadn't seen him for quite a few years. He had never seen him since he had gone by the name of Absalom Stein.

Those three master-work girls who were here right now, Dotty Yekouris, Mary Virginia Schaeffer, Marie Monaghan, they didn't look overly large beside the men they were with. And yet each of them would have stood a quarter of an inch over six feet, barefooted and slouching and smiling wickedly. They were ample in all ways.

That estimate of their size was Duffey's subjective estimate, of course. They may not have loomed that large to other people. But Duffey was their maker, and what size he comprehended for them should have been the size imposed on them. Duffey recalled that Mary Catherine Caruthers, also in this town somewhere, was larger than she would seem to ordinary eyes.

Hans and Marie, Henri Salvatore, Dotty and Mary Virginia, they were overwhelming. Even Absalom Stein was overwhelming tonight.

Just when had Absalom Stein outgrown his grubby pupa form as Hugo Stone? Or hadn't he been one of the many mouthy little Stone brothers and cousins anyhow? Yeah, Absalom was Hugo. But what, by all the compounded mysteries, was this Stein doing with the others of them in St. Louis. How did he even happen to be acquainted with the other talismanic children? There was a wealthy and lurid Jewishness to him such as has not been so powerfully expressed since the times of the Elizabethans, and then only on-stage. In life, there had never been such a type before. Absalom gave the impression that he was wearing a

quantity of splendid jewelry, and he wasn't wearing a single bauble.

The lavish talk that these people poured out! If only it could be recovered it could be bottled and sold. If it could be created again after it was gone, then you would have something. But even the creator Duffey could not create it again. As with all demiurges, angelics, cavern spirits, pure intellects, monsters, the extraordinary conversations of these splendid animations could never be recalled later.

Hans Schultz was a thunder-head out of mythology, a holy ox in the manner of Aquinas himself. But he was such a clash of bulky colors and bulky speed and bulky fellowship! He was too loud.

There was bad and overdone art in every one of them except Mary Virginia. They weren't such things as Melchisedech would put on the market with his reputation for taste behind them. They were such things as he would keep for his own gusty enjoyment and cry out "Gad, what genius I had when I did them!"

Henri Salvatore, the Fat Frenchman from the Swamps, was the center of gravity of any room or building he was in. He was this by sheer weight. Henri was a whopper in color and texture and movement and sound. But balanced proportion was not in him at all.

And Absalom! "Absalom, take off that purple cape with the scarlet lining! It's just too much!" Oh, but he wasn't wearing a purple cape with a scarlet lining at all. He was wearing a simple unfigured sports shirt. It was just something extravagant about him that gave Duffey the impression that he was wearing the outlandish get-up.

The twelve talismanic creations of Melchisedech Duffey were these:

Finnegan, who was the salt of their lives, who was properly named John Solli, who was (hold onto yourself) the son of Monster Giulio. He'll be here tomorrow.

John Schultz who was Hans.

Henri Salvatore, who was going to give Duffey the scenario for the rest of his life.

Vincent Stranahan, the son of Patrick Stranahan and Monica Murray Stranahan, who was going to get married Saturday.

Casey Szymansky, now seen for the thousand-and-first time, and seen with new eyes.

Dotty Yekouris.

Mary Monaghan Schultz.

Mary Virginia Schaeffer.

Teresa (Showboat) Piccone.

(Give those girls more space than that and they'll run away with it.)

Absalom Stein.

Mr. X.

Twelve of them. There was a puzzle how Duffey could have been spiritual and magic father to Mr. X who claimed to be a bit older than Duffey. The answer was that Mr. X was an unrepentant liar who was actually slightly younger than Duffey. There had been the case of Duffey, when he was very young, giving a talisman to an Italian man who was selling some kind of confection out of a hokey-pokey push-cart. But X must be reserved for later.

2

The Animated Marvels left, suddenly, a with a great flourish. And people smiled their 'ain't-they-something' smiles.

Then another of them came in with a group.

Charley Murray came into the Rounders' Club with his sister Monica Murray Stranahan and her husband Patrick Stranahan. And with them was Papa Piccone of the old Star and Garter Theatre. And another person, quite special.

Charley Murray had given orders for a supper to be served in a thrice-special room upstairs. Charley was the acting manager of Rounders'. Duffey was only the King of the place, and the founder, and the half-owner.

The other person with Charley's party was a talisman-child, and her coming set Duffey to quaking in a pleasant terror. This was the daughter of Papa Piccone, the incipient daughter-in-law of Monica and Patrick Stranahan, She was the god-daughter of Beth Keegan, Duffey's old girl. She was Teresa (Showboat) Piccone. She was as much a central creation of the Duffey Corpus as was Finnegan. Duffey's creations had these two foci.

Aw c'mon, no one can describe her more than to say that — well, she was sun-burned quicksilver. She was fire and ice and holy wine. She has been described as 'dark and lithe and probably little.' Well, in her own setting of the dazzling and larger-than-life people, she might have been called little. But in the world itself she might not be. She was of fair size and greatly compromised beauty. The compromising was done by her grimaces and pleasantly ugly facial contortions. But if one could ever get her face to stand still, then she had a thunderous beauty. And in no setting could she ever be called quiet. She was—

No, no, not now, maybe not ever, not in detail! It's dangerous.

"If her specifications were known, then some Magus other than Duffey might make another one of her, and one was enough," said Patrick Stranahan. "Oh my God, how one of her was enough!" Patrick loved his future daughter-in-law. So did Duffey love Teresa. She was a blue-moon person, not to be encountered more than once in a lifetime. Look at the others instead. It is dangerous to look too long at Teresa. You'll get welders' eye-burns. There are infra-red rays and other things coming out of that blue-light phenomenon. Look at the others. Teresa was talking constantly. Duffey did not hear her words. He heard only the cadence of her voice.

Duffey knew Patrick Stranahan well. Patrick used to come into the Rounders' Club while he was still quite a young man, even before Duffey had sold a piece of the club to Charley Murray. And Duffey had known Monica Stranahan, the wife of Patrick, the sister of Charley, for a very long time. He used to love to kiss her for the serenity she gave. She still gave it.

And Duffey had known Papa Piccone (he already had the name 'Papa Piccone' when he was twenty-two years old: he seemed older) in the old, old days. He was and is and would forever be till its destruction the proprietor of the Star and Garter where everyone went for the shows when they were young. Beth Erlenbaum, the ivory statuette, had used to work at the Star and Garter, and she was kindred of the Piccone family. But Duffey had never seen this Teresa Piccone before. And then she was gone suddenly, and he wasn't sure that he had seen her at all.

"Oh, I hardly ever get a good look at her myself," said Piccone her father.

The men were talking. This might have been the same night, upstairs after supper, when they had withdrawn to the trophy room for cigars and brandy and Irish whisky. Or it might have been another night in the big club room at Stranahan's house. It may even have been at Charley Murray's place.

Likely it was several of the nights of that week run together, and the men were talking about weighty subjects. Duffey and Bagby and Murray and Stranahan were there, along with Piccone and Father McGuigan. Stein was there part of the time, or one of the nights. And Finnegan may have been there part of the time.

"We come to the crux, to the crossroads," Patrick Stranahan said. "But the crossroad sign, and the various arms of it, point: 'To nowhere', 'To easy house', 'To crossbar hotel', 'To the charnel house'. There is blood running down

the gaunt tree-piece of the crossroads sign. Some of it is fresh blood, some of it is old and slow-flowing, some of it is placental blood. We had supposed that we had come to the end, for a while, of the rivers of blood. The crossroads sign-post indicates otherwise."

This Patrick Stranahan, a lawyer man who was just rich enough to come hardly into the Kingdom of Heaven, was a very large man, bigger than any of his four sons. He has been described in another place as "a big, hairy man. He rumbled when he talked. He even rumbled when he didn't talk. He had a large and busy stomach and there was always something going on in there.

"As to the blood on the sign-post," Duffey proposed, "Henri Salvatore says that the Devil is being released from his thousand-year durance very soon, possibly this week."

"Henry guesses at the dates," Patrick continued, "and likely at the year, though in all probability it was this year. Just a hundred years ago there was a rumor that the Devil had been released. Maybe that was some other devil, though the events in the past hundred years (1846-1946) indicate that flagrant evil was released into the world at that time. And now the noise is even more ominous. We have heard the big iron bolts sliding back for some time now, but there are a lot of bolts to slide and a lot of locks to unlock before the stout door swings open. That gaudy Stein also has some authentic private information, I believe, but he exaggerates. It doesn't really matter whether the Devil is released last year or this year or next year. The release is imminent, as we all know, and it was a condition that none of us will be able to live with. Some of us will be exalted and awakened by the assault of it, and some of us will be destroyed by it. But none of us will be able to live with it. We don't know just how much difference it will make. The Devil has carried on very effective warfare all during his imprisonment. But now it will be worse, and of a more immediate treachery."

"The Monster Giulio told me recently that a rigged council of Teras-folks had drawn up a petition for the release of the Devil," Bagby said, "so it wasn't just the humans of the narrow definition who have been bespoken by false leaders to petition. Groups of half a dozen other sorts of creatures also have joined in the foulness. Giulio was in St. Louis recently."

"Giulio? He's been dead for ten years at least," Duffey said.

"I didn't say that the creature wasn't dead. I said that he had been in St. Louis recently and had given me these reports," Bagby growled. Bagby had never liked to have his accounts questioned. "My brother, I have my own communications and meetings, and you have yours. Giulio told me something else. He says that at the councils of the Teras, they have both the living and the dead in attendance, and he believes this gives better balance. I believe that the U.S. Congress should adopt a similar practice."

"You know that Finnegan was the son of the Monster Giulio, don't you?" Duffey asked.

"No, of course I don't know it," Bagby said. "The Finnegan who got into town today? He was here, and he left just before you got here, Duffey. Have you ever even met him?"

"No."

"And yet you say that he was the son of Giulio the Monster who was a Teras. You have so much, you know so much, one-aspect-brother-of-mine, for one who knows so little."

"I suspect that this Finnegan is another of your talisman-children, Duffey," Patrick Finnegan said. "I myself have met this Finnegan long ago, when he shipped on the river, long before my son Vincent, who was his best friend, knew him. And as to Duffey's having created a brood of beautiful and bumptious people, I don't find this unlikely at all. I myself made a few people by the modified talismanic method before I made my sons and daughters from my loins. The

latter thing precludes and shuts off the former, forever, always. Let us consider just what these creative conditions are.

“A non-creative human soul would not be possible. We all share in each others creations. We are even partly created by persons who may not be born for another thousand years yet. There is One who creates. And yet, on level 1-B, creation was a group effort and some are better at it than others. Some souls have more creativity than others. Not all souls are as resoundingly creative as others. Not all souls are as resoundingly creative as is Duffey. As to Duffey though: his creations are like a multitude of old, (no no, no old, of new and brightly painted) milk cans clattering down stone steps. They do make a noise!

“The mathematics of the talismanic-creation complex are fantastic. We are dealing with multi-dimensional equations with as many as thirty billion unknown and highly mysterious integers, in which equations every integer is a variable function of all the others. Yes, I believe that Duffey has conspicuously created my own son Vincent, and Piccone's daughter Teresa, and Finnegan, the son of the Monster Giulio (I also knew this Monster, and I once represented him against a motion to have him locked up), and big-brained Hans, and Casey, and many of those beautiful young girls also. But it all works both ways, or it works thirty billion ways. For I myself consciously created this Melchisedech Duffey, even though he was already fifteen or sixteen years old when I first met him. There's a lot more to him than there would have been if I hadn't muddied my creative hands with him. These additional powers that he got from myself and several others at that time aren't seen too clearly in him even yet, but they will be absolutely required in his future trials.”

Duffey remembered that he had picked up a little suavity from Patrick Stranahan, and perhaps other pleasant things.

"You are speaking in false context about any person ever creating anything," said Father McGuigan. "You are indulging in unlawful metaphor."

"Nah, man, nah," Duffey said. "He was only putting into metaphor what was literal fact: that was Patrick's only offense in the present discussion. There was nothing metaphorical about my creations or about my kingship. I *am* a Magus, I *am* a sorcerer. I am a child of gold and minister of bread and wine. I am the Boy King, and I am the King of Salem. I command giants. I move with high royalty, and the trumpets know me by name. I have sat in Kings' conclaves with Solomon and Saul, and with Ptolemy and Chandragupta and Nebuchadnezzar, with Hsien and with Barbarossa, all the way down to—"

"Were you drinking before you joined us tonight, Duffey?" Charley Murray asked him.

"Oh, I've been making a day of it, Charley. There was once a proposed—but never used— Anheuser-Busch ad which read: 'After all, what else was there to do in St. Louis?' I've been to all the places and enjoyed all the drinks. —Um —down to King Stephen of Hungary and Conrad the Second of the Germanies. I believe that they were the newest ones who came to the Kings' Conclaves while I still attended. What, Charley, are you implying that my powers had revived a bit today, and you think that it was only my drinking? But I can still work my golden magic. I can rub my hands together and then pour out anything you wish me to on this library table here. See, I rub my hands together! What do you want me to pour out here?"

"Coined gold," Patrick Stranahan said. "Dated coined gold."

"Any particular date, Patrick?"

"No. I'll not limit you there, Duffey. I know that magic is easily wilted by excess details."

"You will notice that my hands are empty and my sleeves are rolled up," Duffey said.

"Get with it, Duff, get with it," Papa Piccone said. "I have a new magician every week at the S & G. You'll do nothing I haven't seen before."

Duffey rubbed his hands together some more. Then he poured seven gold pieces out on the table. And Patrick Stranahan and the others examined them.

"These are all United States Five Dollar Gold Pieces," Patrick said, "and all of them were minted about ten years ago. You could easily have had them on you, God knows why. And I recall that you used to do magic tricks."

"No, no, it was Charley Murray here who used to do magic tricks," Duffey said. "I used to do magic. I could have poured anything you asked me out of my hands, a baby dinosaur, for instance. I'd have done that if you'd asked me to. Now I won't."

"I made a man once," Papa Piccone said suddenly. Papa was named Gaetano, but nobody ever called him anything except Papa. "I don't believe that it was a metaphorical man. Right at the end of it, at least, before he broke up, he was real. So I know that the thing can be done. I create a lot of characters at my theatre the Star and Garter, at least one new one a week for more than thirty years now. Some of these are classics and they will live forever. Some of them are numb-bums and they do not have any validity at all. Even a burlesque character must burlesque something that was valid, something that was possible, something that was within the human spectrum. It is only human things that can be burlesqued. Inanimate things can't be burlesqued, and animals can't be. Some of them, such as camels, are natural burlesques, but they cannot be burlesqued further.

"One of my worst failures was Oliver Oscar Omygosh. He was bad. He stuttered 'O—O—O—'. He had a big nose and a big rump, but neither of them was the right shape to be funny. He had fiery red eyes. He wore size fifteen shoes, and he was continually falling on his face. I was going to drop Oliver Oscar as no good after the third day and night of him,

but I got a phone call after the late night performance. 'This was O-O-O-Oscar O-O-O-Oliver O-O-Omygosh,' some clown on the phone said. 'You hold me up to o-o-o-opprobrium when you make fun of me on your stage. You make me an o-o-object of ridicule. I'm o-overly sensitive and this is a t-t-terrifying experience. I beg you to stop it.' 'Who is this?' I demanded of the telephone. 'Which clown is this? Jerry? Sam? Orlando? Pietro? Caspar?' 'This is O-Oscar O-O-Oliver O-O-Omygosh,' the telephone said.

"The next night (I had kept the character on) he came to see me back stage. None of the jokers I knew would have done a character that badly, even for a joke. Oh, his rump was big enough, but it just didn't have burlesque shape or style. I kicked him on it. It wasn't padding. It was him. His eyes were fire-red, but they weren't the gaudy orange-red of the make-up crayon. They were swollen red as if he had been crying. He had. His nose was big enough for the role, but it looked like cheap and wrong-colored Pleistocene such as kids use, not professional quality make-up putty. 'Aw, get that silly thing off your face,' I said. 'I do hate slovenly workmanship.' I swung at him flat-handed to slap that hopeless nose off. I brought blood from it, but I didn't slap it off. It was real, and he was real. He was exactly as I had envisioned him and made him, a hopeless botch, the worst character I ever made.

"You can check on this," Papa said. "I'm not lying. There was such a person. He's in the St. Louis phone book for 1939: Oscar Oliver Omygosh. Go down to the main telephone office tomorrow and look in a 1939 directory. You will find that Omygosh is listed."

"I remember him," said Bagby. "He ran a little novelty shop just—why, it was just two doors from your own Star and Garter, Papa. It was a novelty business with the unusual name 'The O-O-O What Fun Novelty Store'. Old triple O had glandular conditions and dizzy spells. He suffered a lot of pain and melancholy. He stumbled and fell down a lot, and

he cried a lot. Papa Piccone, you are a fraud. He was true. But you didn't make him."

"No, no, *nessuno*! My whole story was true," Piccone assured the group. "If I hadn't made him for the burlesque set, then he wouldn't have been. I made the man by accident. But I made him, so I know that persons can be made."

"As to the release of the Devil," Duffey said, "there is another sense in which he may be released. Casey does not believe that the Devil should be eternally damned. He believes that he should have his release from damnation after a time, and he is working for that sort of release. In fact, he had made an offer to God to trade souls with the Devil and suffer damnation in his place."

"Casey has since lowered his sights and negotiated a lesser trade," Absalom Stein said. "He has traded souls with me. Really, it was just an old soul of mine that I traded to him—the soul of Hugo Stone the Chicago red. And I believe that it was an old soul of his that he traded to me. He has kept his later and muddled soul."

"Is Casey a red now?" Bagby asked.

"He is a red," Stein said. "And now I am white—white as a Gary snow after the furnaces have coughed on it for a few days."

"The enemy, in this century, was wearing a red stocking cap on one of his seven heads," Bagby said. "The heads of that old enemy change names; but the names of the seven present heads are Dialectic Materialism, Artistic Degradation, Judas Priestism, Secular Liberalism, Panaceic Pentecostalism, Murderous Molochism, Atheistic Communism."

"Do you believe that Bill O'Shivaree will hang, Stranahan?" Father McGuigan asked to try to divert the conversation. He was a progressive priest and he was angry

at this pointing out of so many of the things that he supported. And Bagby could whip him in this combat.

"I'm defending O'Shivaree, am I not?" Patrick Stranahan asked pompously.

"I know you're defending him. I asked whether he would hang."

"No. Not unless I lose the case," Patrick said.

"And just what context are your Animated Marvels to be considered in, Duffey?" Stranahan asked a moment later to get Duffey out of a brooding spell he had fallen into.

"Oh, they are mostly in the context of the Argo Legend," Duffey said. "And, of course, that was intersected by the Finnegan Cycle. Finnegan is the original Finn McCool."

"And to just what species do these Marvels belong?" Patrick asked. "Since you are the father of one of them, and Piccone here was the father of another, I might be tempted to say 'The Human Species'. But that is too narrow. They all have something of the Teras species in them too."

"I have heard that hinted of, but just what is it?"

"Oh, Gargoyles, Neanderthals, Boogers, Vagaries, Variants. We all have some of that variant blood. I put more than ordinary amounts into my creations."

But Duffey was still brooding.

"All right, I will prove it!" he cried suddenly, banging his hands together and going back to an earlier subject. He rubbed his hands, then they sparked blue and gold sparks.

"I can produce anything on the table here. Who wants me to produce a live baby dinosaur right now? I'll pour it out right here on the library table, and it'll be alive."

"There is great danger to you at your age, Duffey," Father McGuigan said. "Irishmen in particular are in danger of letting their genie be imprisoned in a bottle when they come to about your age, and the imprisonment can well go on forever. You know what kind of bottle I'm talking about. You had better forego it."

“What? Forego my last lonesome vice?” Duffey asked. “Who will challenge me to produce a live baby dinosaur right here and now on this table?”

And, for some reason, none of the men challenged him. Duffey seemed a bit relieved that they didn't. He wasn't absolutely certain that he could have done that thing, but he could do kindred things.

“A baby pterodactyl then?” he asked. “Or an emu, or a dodo bird? What? Do none of you want to see wonders? A baby llama, a porcupine? a new-hatched duck with pieces of the shell still on it? Dammit, how about a living mouse?”

“A mouse is always nice,” Papa Piccone said with a touch of compassion, whether for Melchisedech or for the mouse none could say.

Duffey sighed. And he poured out his hands.

It was a young, live mouse that he poured out on the table, and they all laughed a bit. Duffey, crooked or uncrooked, had always been pretty good at these little pieces of magic.

“You call that a dinosaur?” Patrick Stranahan asked with typical lawyer's illogic.

“No, I call it a mouse,” Duffey said. “But if any of you had challenged me to do it, then it would have been a dinosaur.”

“You could have had the mouse already in your pocket,” Stranahan said.

“So? But I did not reach to my pocket. I could have had a baby dinosaur already in my pocket; or a baby horse. I have big pockets.”

So the men talked that evening, several evenings really, on weighty subjects.

Here was an explanation of some of the happenings and some of the people who took places in St. Louis in that last week of May in the year 1946.

Vincent Stranahan, the son of Patrick and Monica, and a talisman child, was marrying Teresa Piccone that Saturday. She was a talisman child also. Vincent didn't know anything about the talisman business. Teresa likely knew all about it.

Vincent had been in the army in the same battery with John Schultz (who was Hans), with Kasmir Szymansky (who was Casey), with Henri Salvatore who was a Fat Frenchman from the Cajun swamps, and with John Solli who was Finnegan. Duffey had wondered by what means his various talismanic creations would meet each other. The U.S. Army was the answer. And the new question was 'Would there have been a U.S. Army if it hadn't been required to bring Duffey's creations together?'

The five boys had been good friends in the army, and had been known as the Dirty Five. All of them, out of the army less than three months and not very heavily settled into anything yet, were in town for the wedding. And Teresa the bride had an Italian nose on her that had to be into everybody's business. She found out about the girlfriends or spouses of all of them and contacted them to invite them to the wedding also. And they came, that the scripture might be fulfilled.

Teresa already knew Marie Monaghan the wife of Hans. Hans and Marie were already living in St. Louis, so of course, they would come. Mary Catherine Carruthers, Mary Virginia Schaeffer, Dotty Yekouris were also procured. These were all people of the Argo Legend also. It was the first and only time that they would all be together this side of the legend.

Absalom Stein also knew everything and everybody. He had known all five of the boys in the same army battery where he had been a sort of special-services person. He hadn't been of the inner intimacy. It wasn't sure whether he had been one of the Argo crewmen. He went under different

names sometimes. He didn't tell anyone why he had come from Chicago to St. Louis. The truth was that Henri Salvatore had written to this Absalom, as he had also written to Melchisedech Duffey, to tell him to come to St. Louis to receive the assignment for the rest of his life.

So it was only by a coincidence of incredibly long arms that eleven of the twelve persons whom Melchisedech Duffey had created would be together in St. Louis, Missouri that last week of May.

"Whomever the joke is on," Duffey said out loud in a seafood place, "it isn't on me. I will have the bunch of them today, even my central creation."

"The joke, Duffey, is that your central creation is a hollow one," the big-nosed kid said, "and the joke is on me. That's the irony of all the cryptic stuff. I have some good scrimshaw here, and some good paintings. And oysters."

"Don't say that," Duffey growled. "If my central creation were a hollow one, that would reflect on me."

"And on me," the big-nosed kid said. "Oh how it does reflect on me!" They were in the Broadway Oyster House, and the big-nosed kid had ordered one hundred oysters. What epic hero was it who ate one hundred huge oysters? That's right, one hundred oysters. And the one hundred oysters had been served to him on quite a large platter. Oysterman Charleroi who commanded the Oyster House didn't even blink at orders like that, but maybe he blinked inside. The big-nosed kid had motioned to Duffey to join him at eating the hundred oysters, and he had called Duffey by name. So the Duff had joined him. And the kid sent oysters from his platter, a dozen here, a dozen yonder, to other diners. But some of the diners refused the oysters in surly fashion.

"They are the ones who will go to Hell, Duffey," the big-nosed kid said. "This was the test, and they fail it. Mark their names out of the Book of Life."

"All right. I've marked them out," Duffey said.

And some of the diners accepted the oysters and waved appreciation. "Those have a chance, they have a chance," the kid said. "It isn't sure yet. There may be other tests for them. But they are, for the moment at least, on the road to salvation."

These were good and well-done oysters, with plenty of butter and sand. This kid was very lean. He pulled thick bulky packages out of hidden pockets and remained neither more nor less lean. "Just have a look at these Duffey. You may as well take possession of them. You can remit to me somewhere if you ever sell any of them. I have heard that, of all undiscerning art dealers, you are the most undiscerning. My kind of dealer."

"My God!" Duffey cried as he unrolled a big 4x8 foot picture (how could the kid have had so long a roll in one of his pockets anyhow?) "This is an original Van Ghi."

"Oh, I'm Van Ghi," the kid said, "but I don't know whether I'll paint under that name again. I'm getting about good enough to use my own name."

"My God, this is worth thousands," Duffey said.

"Yeah, it's pretty good," the kid agreed. "But these scrimshaw pieces are at least as good and you won't be able to get more than three or four dollars for each of them. The only ones you can sell them to are sea men. But the sea men collectors will recognize them as carvings of Count Finnegan. My immediate aim and aspiration was to go to St. Kitts or Basse Terre and be a beach bum. The lack of money was all that prevents. It takes a fortune of at least half a million dollars."

"When I was last a beach bum, back in the seven hidden years of my life, it didn't take hardly any money at all," Duffey said, handling the scrimshaw carvings with excited hands.

"A good beach bum has to have the air of big money about him," the kid insisted. "Of money impounded, or of money reserved, of money abrogated or refused perhaps,

but of money that has left its aroma and green stain on him. Unless people will whisper of a beach bum, 'He has millions whenever he wants them', or 'He poured out millions as if they were water', unless people spin such legends about him, then he isn't the highest sort of bum. There is no way it can be faked. Nobody ever attained the status of top bum without deserving it."

Duffey was shaking so hard that he could hardly eat his oysters. For the paintings, yes (there were a dozen truly magnificent), and for the carvings, yes, but mostly for the person here. Did not Fingal the Hero, and in another version it was Finn McCool, once eat one hundred oysters and each of them bigger than a wagon wheel? Was this kid, no bigger than Duffey in appearance, an incognito hero or giant? Who was it who had lived all those lives underground? Which high hero had been the son of a Teras? But Duffey's shaking soon turned into delighted laughter.

Why should he be overpowered by one of his own creations? This kid was seven famous underground artistic geniuses in one, but he wouldn't have been any of them if it hadn't been for Duffey. Why should he be overwhelmed by the son of a Teras when he had been a close personal friend of that very Teras, the Monster Giulio? Why should" ?

The big-nosed kid was John Solli (Finnegan), the son of the Monster Giulio, of course, the central creation of Duffey himself.

"My father Giulio once said that he found only seven or eight friends in this world, and all of them were somehow related to you," Finnegan said. "He didn't really love a city; he loved the swamps. He took me down to the Cajun swamps several times, and he made 'calls' for me that I would call with when we drifted along in a flat boat with 'ceiling three feet' over us, of swamp fronds. Other fathers made duck calls for their sons, or coon calls, or swamp deer calls.

"My father Giulio made panther calls and alligator calls, and devil-fish calls, and swamp-boas calls, and hairy man calls, and white shark calls. I never knew what I'd call up from the water or down from the vined trees when I put one of those calls to my mouth. He whittled them out of the wood of the tupelo-gum tree. There was no wood like it."

"What will you do now, Finnegan?"

"I'll break my hands and my head for a little while on the customary things. Then I'll throw it all over and wander. Wander and paint, and paint and wander."

"I wandered for seven years once," Duffey said. "And now I can go back, almost at will, and wander still more *in those same years*."

"And I will wander for seven years," Finnegan said. "Then they will bury me on the Marianao Coast of Cuba. Whether they can keep me buried I don't know. Someday there will come to your hands a great painting 'The Resurrection of Count Finnegan'. The story in this painting will indicate that they are not able to keep me buried."

"I will go back to New Orleans. So will you go there, by the way. But I will stay there only a few months or weeks. Then I will wander. I haven't any scenario to follow. Neither God nor Henri Salvatore had provided me with one. For impediments I am given my own thorn in the flesh and my own monsterness. But there are certain documents that I can carry in my mind. These, and the things that I paint wherever I find a good painting surface in the world, are the closest things to a guide or scenario I have."

Finnegan shook hands with Duffey in that peculiar six-fingered grip that a Texas will use with a friend who was not a Texas. They joined in dark and lean laughter, and they sat together for a while longer. Duffey looked closely at this one of the creatures he had made. Whether it was good or bad, he liked it.

4

It is necessary to introduce a number of original documents here. They are all essential to this account. Some of them were beloved by Finnegan, some of them by Duffey, some of them by everybody we know.

‘Be calm and vigilant, because your enemy the devil is prowling like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Stand up to him...’

[Dotty O’Toole. *Sonnet.*]

‘I want you to be happy, always happy in the Lord: I repeat, what I want is your happiness. Let your tolerance be evident to everyone: the Lord is very near. There is no need to worry; but if there is anything you need, pray for it, asking God for it with prayer and thanksgiving, and that peace of God, which is so much greater than we understand, will guard our hearts and thoughts, in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, fill your minds with everything that is true, everything that is noble, everything that is good and pure, everything that we love and honor, and everything that can be thought virtuous or worthy of praise. Keep doing all the things that you learned from me and have been taught by me and have heard or seen that I do. Then the God of peace will be with you.’

[Paul. *Philippians* 4:4-9]

‘...for we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers, against the shapers of darkness in this world and against the spiritual army of evil in high stations.’

[Paul. *Ephesians* 6:12-13]

‘It is they who are the spiritual army of evil in high stations, the sneering and deforming devils of the word-mills. And the high stations that they occupy are sometimes stations inside the Church itself.’

[Miles O’Connel. *Handbook of Treasons.*]

“~ We find in it the ground for the most cheering hope of the future; provided that the associations we have described continue to grow and spread, and are well and wisely administered. Let the State watch over these societies of citizens united together in the exercise of their right; but let it not thrust itself into their peculiar concerns and their

organizations, for things move and live by the soul within them, and they may be killed by the grasp of a hand from without...

‘Prejudice, it was true, was mighty, and so was the love of money; but if the sense of what is just and right be not destroyed by depravity of heart, their fellow citizens are sure to be won over to a kindly feeling towards men whom they see to be so industrious and so modest, who so unmistakably prefer honesty to lucre, and the sacredness of duty to all other considerations.’

[Leo XIII. *The Condition of Labor.*]

‘I have said that the prime product of the Reformation was the isolation of the soul. That truth contains, in its development, very much more than its mere statement might promise.

‘The isolation of the soul means a loss of corporate sustenance; of the sane balance produced by common experience, a public certainty, and the general will. The isolation of the soul was the very definition of its unhappiness. But this solvent applied to society does very much more than merely complete and confirm human misery.

‘In the first place, and underlying all, the isolation of the soul releases in a society a furious new accession of force. The break-up of any stable system, in physics as in society, makes actual a prodigious reserve of potential energy. It transforms the power that was keeping things together into a power driving separately each component part, the effect of an explosion.’

[H. Belloc. *Europe and the Faith.*]

‘Bootless for such as these the mighty task
Of bottling God the Father in a flask.’

[H. Belloc. *Heroic Poem in Praise of Wine.*]

‘Right in the middle of all these things there stands up an enormous exception... It is nothing else than the loud assertion that this mysterious maker of the world has visited his world in person. It declares that really and even recently, right in the middle of historic times, there did walk into this world this original invisible being; about whom the thinkers make theories and the mythologies hand down myths; the man who Made the World. That such a higher personality exists behind all things has indeed been implied by the best thinkers, as well as by the most beautiful legends. But nothing of this sort has ever been implied in any of them. It was simply false to say that the other... heroes had claimed to be the mysterious master and maker, of whom the world has dreamed and disputed. Not one of them had ever claimed to be anything of the sort. The most that any religious prophet had said was that he was the true servant of such a being. The most that any primitive myth had ever suggested was that the Creator was present at the Creation. But that the Creator was present... in the daily life of the Roman Empire —that is

something utterly unlike anything else in nature. It is the one startling statement that man has made since he spoke his first articulate word...'

[G. K. Chesterton. *The Everlasting Man*.]

'These monsters are meant for the gargoyles of a definite cathedral. I have to carve gargoyles, because I can carve nothing else; I leave to others the angels and the arches and the spires. But I am very sure of the style of the architecture and of the consecration of the church.'

[G. K. Chesterton. *On Gargoyles*.]

'Nevertheless, the struggle between good and evil remained in the world as a sad legacy of the original fall. Nor has the ancient tempter ever ceased to deceive mankind with false promises. It was on this account that one convulsion following upon another has marked the passage of the centuries, down to the revolution of our own days... Entire peoples find themselves in danger of falling back into a barbarism worse than that which oppressed the greater part of the world at the coming of the redeemer.

"This all too imminent danger, Venerable Brethren, as you have already surmised, was Bolshevistic and Atheistic Communism...'

[Pius XI. *Atheistic Communism*.]

'Only because it is inclusive can Catholicism be exclusive; only because it comprehends all religious truth can it be intolerant of all error. It is because it is the Catholic Center that it cannot admit any other center, to regard as central any portion of the circumference.'

[E.I. Watkin. *The Catholic Center*.]

'But there are too the day to day, or rather the moment to moment choices of heaven and hell. Before every human heart that has ever beat out its allotted measure, the dare of goals as high as God himself was tossed down; to be accepted, or to be fled from in Terror.'

[Farrel & Healy. *My Way of Life, the Summa Simplified for Everyone*.]

"There are certain Iron Meadows that are inhabited by Aspects, and we cannot be sure that God knows about them. Some aspects of the Argo Legend dwell in one of these Iron Meadows, and neither God nor Duffey knows about them.'

[Bascom Bagby. *Letters After I Am Dead*.]

'A Duffey there was who had views
On subjects diverse and diffuse.
But we are the stuffy

Inventions of Duffey,
And Duffey's a gruffy *magus*.'

[Dotty Yekouris. *Pelican Pellets*.]

'The boys in the street often call 'Hot Stuff' at me, and it is a familiar and friendly name. But they do not know, except for several medical students among them who have heard of my case, that I have a body temperature of one hundred and eleven degrees. The doctors have told me that I should be a bird, or that I should be dead. Well, I am not a bird. I fly sometimes, but privately. And I am not dead. I will never die.

'I have asked for almost every gift that comes into my head, and I have been given many of them. One I much prize was the gift of calmness. I cannot command *everything*, but I can command tempests, alike meteorological and society and soul tempests, and they will be silent. I can rebuke the winds and the sea I can make hurricanes veer off and lose all their substance in rain.

'I have been given other gifts, but I wonder why some such strong gifts have been put into my hands: no hands have ever been weaker than mine. On the 'grip machine' at the 'Fun House out on the Lake' I can grip only thirty-seven pounds. Dotty Yekouris can grip a hundred and ninety pounds. But it is into my hands that the care of the whole world is placed for as much as one full hour out of every twenty-four.'

[Margaret Stone. *Third Epistle to the Kids in St. Louis*.]

'It is written that if they will not believe Moses and the Prophets, neither will they believe one risen from the Dead. My God, My God, they have got to believe the One risen from the Dead... Why should I not affirm the doctrine of the Real Presence of Dauphin Street at midnight? There are people on Dauphin Street at midnight to whom it has never been preached... Don't you ever have the feeling that *this night one more must be found*? Imagine the panic of the Patriarch when he could not find seventy. And the figure was reduced, and he still could not find them. *This* night, perhaps, something will happen to the world unless one more can be found. He may destroy it if it falls short by that one. I fancy that thousands of times it has just got by, and many times it has just got by by one. And what if I alone can find that one tonight, and the world will stop if I don't... others who knew the urgency. Maybe one of them was worn out and not allowed to die until I came to replace him...'

[Margaret Stone. *In Archipelago*.]

'We are all of us Argonauts of the *Argo*, but we have been shipwrecked or stranded on this mundane shore. We are stranded with the caution that we must not allow this shore to remain wrongly mundane. This has become a virtual exile to us, and we come to doubt whether we will ever sail on those sweet seas again.

'But we are more fortunated than most. And we have the surety, if we do not destroy it, that we will be on that Bark again, in another world if not in this one. We remember it and ourselves. Duffey may remember it less than any of us, but he was custodian of the talismans which were our recollection; his was the responsibility of activating us to new life after we had slept.

'It was the Risen Christ who said 'Wait here on this shore until I call you.' All who have been on the *Argo* understand this.'

[Hans Schultz]

'If Duffey did indeed make us, it was three thousand years ago, for we sailed together on the *Argo* that far in the past. But the talismans (they were part of the gold filigree of the *Argo*, laid over pieces of the 'Talking Oak' Dordogne, and the gold that was used came from the Great Fleece that we carried), the talismans have not the function of creating so much as the function of Anamnesis or Recollection. They were to awake us and fill us with remembering. It is by us having held the talismans at our birth that we now recognize and recollect each other, now that we are once again in a wakeful state. Our coming together and knowing each other now is a prefiguration of the Resurrection Itself. We are under a blessing. In our own life (our mysterious latter life now in the contemporary world) we have some of the experiences that are Beyond Life. We are born again more literally than are most. We have here our first resurrection in the Resurrection of Christ.

'It was a sweet, sad paganism that said,
'And if thou wilt, remember.
And if thou wilt, forget.'

And we have remembered, as yet in fragments only, but we remember more and more as time unwraps from us. The talismans that we grasped at birth were pieces of the Holy *Argo*. They re-create us and tell us who we are.'

[Teresa (Showboat) Piccone.]

'The temptation and fascination, Melchisedech, was always to be going somewhere. This temptation will become even stronger with the personal release of the Adversary. But better than going somewhere is *being there already*. There is a saying that 'Happiness is not a destination but a journey'. This is wrong. Oh, our life is a journey, but it is only a journey through time and space. It isn't away from our foundation ever. We are born or reborn into the state of having already arrived. We have an inner orientation. We know where it is. The 'Quest Completed' was our basic state. The Golden Fleece had already been found, and we were already wrapped in it. The 'Grail Abundant', the 'Grail-Filled-to-Overflowing' has

been possessed, and we eat and drink in that possession of it. We are in Paradise. Our task is to rebuild the world, but not yet to rebuild it in another place.

‘Our construction will always be ‘old-fashioned’, and it will be hooted at by the hooters. It will be as old-fashioned as the first Creation: it will be from the beginning. Oh, we will drink new wine out of new bottles, but both the wine and the bottles were already new when the Day Star was made.

‘Avoid the perils of the false activists who are always bedeviling one to be moving and doing. There is, among the urgencies which we must find or make, a paradisaic laziness which we must cultivate. This is absolutely required of us. It is not slovenliness, it is not indolence, it is not *pigritia*. It is laziness in its proper form. When we examine our consciences at night, after no matter how many hectic hours, we must ask ‘Did I take sufficient time to be blessedly lazy this day?’ There can be no peace or calm without it.

‘Is this prospect of rebuilding the world sufficiently exciting? A spastic or jerky excitement is not consonant with grace. A stimulate is only a goad, and most often it is a self-torture. Excitement is one of the fleshy things that is easiest to give up and most useful in its absence.

‘Are there, in rebuilding the world, any details too trivial to concern ourselves with? Oh, we concern ourselves where the spirit dictates. Right management of the muskrat population on Baratania Bay may be a detail that we should be concerned with. The election of a president will almost certainly be too trivial for our bothering. And do not be misled by evil persons who say that everyone should vote. In three votings out of four, no honest person can vote for any candidate listed, and no honest person does. It will be given us to know what things are important and what things are not.

‘Duffey, whom I have not met yet, reminds us that we are all Kings in the Kingdom, from our childhoods, and in our own right. We may be leper kings, but the ‘Leper King’ was a holy man.

‘Margaret Stone, whom I have not met, reminds us that we must always be aflame. Why yes, that is another thing. When we examine our consciences at night, we must also ask, ‘Did I spend sufficient time in the Fiery Furnace today?’ It is so easy to forget these things.

‘Now the times become clotted and portentous. It is the second coming of Satan after his release from bondage. It has happened already, or it is happening right now. Some say that, if Satan is to be released, it seems most likely that he was released at the start of the First World War and that he was responsible for the bloodshed then and since. No, the blood so far is only a trickle to the blood that will come. What has gone before was only the Devil rattling the bars of his cage. Now he is out.

‘The millennium has already been here. The bolting of the door on the Devil was done quietly by Otto I of the Germanies at Aachen in the year 946. Later, but in the same year, the prisoner was transferred to another and faster prison. This was on the peninsula called the Euxine Chersonese, and modernly known as the Crimea on the Black Sea.

‘And you, Duffey, be in St. Louis the last week of May and I will give you your instructions for the rest of your life. That sounds pompous of me, does it not? It isn't though.’

[Henri Salvatore. *Letter to Melchisedech Duffey*.]

(This is the longer letter, the one that was not sent.)

‘The Argo Voyages are not merely something that we took part in many centuries ago. They still go on. This is our rich other life that continues in reserved places while we wake and sleep and wake again in this place which I call ‘The World of Record’.

‘There is one first instruction that we remember when we wake: “There are not any ordinary persons on the *Argo*; and such ordinary persons as you may find on the Shore must be reformed out of their ordinariness.”

‘Yes, we have with us King Melchisedech the Duff who was always intrinsic to our crew. A King on Land he was, but he was never Captain of the Crew except on a temporary acting basis when he took his regular turn of duty. His main assignment was always to activate us from any periodic sleep. Persons of other Holy Quests and Successes do sometimes fall into these sleeps, and they sleep until the end of time. Not so with us. We wake, and we wake again.

‘God bless our Crew. God bless our Ship. God bless this shore, which was named ‘The World’, until we go to sea once more.’

[Dotty Yekouris.]

5

Teresa Piccone was a delight. She was all kindness and clairvoyance and charm. She was one of those sly-eyed, urchin-grinning, gray-stone-carved Blessed Virgins who broke out all over Northern Italy in the latter part of the Tenth Century. Whatever forgotten rooms or forgotten grounds they are dug out of, they have a shouting freshness as well as a mossy sense of absurdity on them. It was almost certain that there was some moss growing on Showboat Piccone, for she was an Earth Creature. Green moss growing in the corners of her eyes, yes. It is quite certain that there was star-sparkle growing all over her, for she was a Heavenly

creature. There was no reason for Duffey to be ashamed for his workmanship in her or for her electric presence. This Showboat had great compassion and affection for her scenarist in the human comedy, for her maker Melchisedech Duffey. And she was the finest thing that the talented Duffey ever did.

And Vincent Stranahan — Oh, he was the young man that this Teresa was marrying. He was the best friend of Finnegan. He was the best friend of almost everybody. He was brilliant, of course, since he was one of Duffey's Animated Marvels, but he may have been the least brilliant of the bunch. It would be close, between Vincent and Casey and Mary Catherine. And yet he was outstanding by any other standards. He was so outstanding that Duffey could say to his old friend, Vincent's father Patrick:

“They don't make them like they used to, Patrick,” this to that huge and somewhat weed-grown father. “They make them a lot better now.”

“I know it, Duff, I know it,” Patrick Stranahan said.

And then there was Finnegan. Finnegan had all the goodness (what an odd, what an only word for him!), all the preternaturalness, all the monsterness of his father Giulio. He hadn't quite the sheer and shocking ugliness of appearance that had belonged to his father; he didn't have the great bulk of his father; he hadn't quite the same roaring protest under torture: he may not have suffered such abysmal tortures, though he had suffered. Finnegan believed himself to be half Human and half Teras; but it's only to the narrow vision that there's a difference between the Human and the Teras. Only in a manner of speaking are they different. There are, to one who sees with open eyes, half a dozen such nations of the one and intermingled people of God.

It was hard to come onto the essence of this Finnegan who was as quicksilverish as Teresa. It was Finnegan who

explained to Duffey (probably at their first meeting over the one hundred oysters) the difficulty of finding the essence of any person.

"We had a great and high-ranking analyst," Finnegan said. "He was of the equivalent of demiurge or archangel rank, and he was examining a contrary and powerful person to discover the essence of him. Duffey, he dissected that person, and stripped down the layers of him as if he were a Duffey onion. He took the hide clear off of that fellow and threw it into a corner where it glimmered and glowed with its electric aura pulsing and throbbing about it. 'Why do they put so much wrapping on them?' the analyst asked. He unstrung and removed the limbs, and he decided that they were not essential. They looked somewhat like giant limbs and somewhat like statuary limbs as they lay there. The analyst took out all the viscera and decided that they spent a very long journey to go a short distance; he decided that they weren't essential either. He removed all the organs and lights from the person's cavity, and he could find no essence in them. He took out the brains with their dangling cords. He discarded it all, layer after layer and wrapping after wrapping. 'We've got to be getting close to the essence of it,' he said, but he wasn't. When he unwrapped the very last portion, he found that it was all wrapping with nothing inside it. He hadn't found the essence. The whole thing had been an empty jug wrapped in primordial straw.

"But, in the middle of the night, he got up and went to the dissecting chamber where he had unwrapped the man. 'I must have left the light on in there,' he said, but he hadn't. And yet there was a light. The whole scattered thing glowed with light. So the analyst wrote a note to himself 'Examine, tomorrow, whether there was not an essence somehow diffused through all these wrappings themselves. This light has got to come from somewhere.'

"But the analyst himself died before morning, and his exploration was not and has not been completed."

Yes, you could skin Finnegan and throw his pelt into the corner, and it would still crackle with aura and smoke with essence. But one couldn't find all his essence bottled in one place.

Finnegan was an artist of transcending talent, and as such, he was recognized by Duffey the art dealer and artist dealer. The only medium in which Duffey was a true artist was in the manufactory or activation of people, and in this Finnegan was his greatest masterpiece. No, no, this wasn't a contradiction. It has been said that Teresa was the finest (but not the greatest) thing that Duffey ever wrought. Finnegan was not fine.

Finnegan was a vagabond, and Duffey had been a master vagabond for seven years. He recognized that Finnegan's whole life so far had been a displaced seven-year wandering through the purgatorial lands that seemed to coincide with the world.

These were all of Duffey's Animated Marvels. The essence of none of them was easily distilled out:

The big-brained and big-hearted Hans. What an edifice! The most open man in the world, and who could know him?

Henri Salvatore (The Emperor Henry of Neustria) who had whole empires within himself and to whom had been given the task of rebuilding the world. Not since Archbishop Turpin of the Charlemagne Cycle had there been so great a prelate who was also so great a general.

Casey Szymansky whom Duffey had known almost every day of that boy's life, and had hardly known at all. But some of his mentations and notions had already sent tremors through the whole cosmic signaling system.

Stein of the people! Stein had received one of Casey's old souls in a weird trade, but the combination was older than either of them. *Der Kasmir-Stein* is known mostly as a remote jewel of India, but it is a hybrid jewel of disparate essences. It was a new appearance here, and its glitter

began to make itself felt everywhere. It was not Casey, it was not Stein; it was an abiding spark struck off by their glancing contact.

Marie Monaghan, 'Our Southern Nature's Solitary Boast', the greatest thing that Australia ever gave to the rest of the world.

Mary Catherine Carruthers ('But Thou, Chicago Ephrata, out of Thee shall come—'), how many of the great ones have overlooked her to their loss?

Mary Virginia Schaeffer who was the pride of both Galveston Texas and Morgan City Louisiana. More of her, more of her forever!

Dotty Yekouris who was a journalist and a member of the prestigious 'Poison Pen Society', as well as barmaid.

And Finnegan and Showboat Teresa Piccone and Mr. X. X will not be given now. He plans careful entrances, and he will enter in his own time.

Aw c'mon, you know that there aren't people like any of these where you come from. Some pilgrims will wander through a lifetime without meeting even one genuine Duffey Animation. And there are eleven who were in one city at one time, if they had only been there.

Was it absolutely certain that this was the original crew of the original *Argo*? Yes, it was certain. It has been checked out and proved.

The wedding was a fine one, done by one of the perfect couples and by Father McGuigan in Teresa's parish church (the Stranahan's church too; they lived only a block apart). There were numbers of distinguished Irishmen and Italians there, and smatterings of the people of barbarian races.

The reception was a grand one. Duffey shined by his antics, and he was outshined by many of his own people, especially the Finnegan who surpassed himself. There was pleasure and grandeur (people are entitled to that on such occasions), and also some of the scrubbiest carrying-on ever. And there was the time when things were coming to their

glorious winding-down and Dotty Yekouris with hands on hips had looked at the magus and laughed:

“Thou’rt perfect, Duffey!”

“Such early perfection will do the boy in,” Henri Salvatore warned. “If he would be still more perfect, let him follow me.”

And Duffey had to speak to Henri about that for a moment:

“You wrote to me ‘Come to St. Louis’, Henri, and I came,” Duffey said. “But you have not yet given me the scenario for the rest of my life. Give it now.”

“Come to New Orleans,” Henri said. “You have been here in Damascus—St. Louis, for a week, and you have been given the opportunity for blindness and recovery, though I haven’t noticed you undergoing either of the experiences. Now you can go to New Orleans and labor there for the rest of your life. There was a blessed place there, an asphalt garden, and you will grow cucumbers in it for the rest of your days. You’ll grow them for the Greater Glory, and they’ll be superior ones.”

Finnegan, Henri, Duffey, Dotty, and Mary Schaeffer all got into Mary’s Ford and drove down to New Orleans. This was the last Saturday of May of the year 1946.

And also, on that last Saturday of May of 1946, on the almost-island of Crimea, out of a deep iron-doored dungeon, the Devil was released from his thousand-year imprisonment.

But hadn’t he been released just a hundred years before that, in 1846? We don’t know. Maybe the release was a recurring thing.

Book Six

'For this Melchisedech was King of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him to whom Abraham divided the tithes of all. First, as his name shows, he was King of Justice, and then he was also King of Salem, that was, King of Peace. Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but likened to the Son of God, he continued a priest forever"! But he whose genealogy is not recorded among them received titles of Abraham and blessed him who had the promwase.

[Paul. *Hebrews*.]

Several other primary documents are here. They are necessary for an understanding of the recent history and present condition of the world. Primary documents are always like treasures of gold and gems spread out to daylight. Or they are like gold and gems would be if they were many times more rare than they now are.

'With buck-swords in Neustria during the millennium! Duffey died there, during the seven hidden years of his life, and somebody saved his ashes in a cigar box or humidor or urn. It wasn't an ordinary cigar box or whatever. It was an extraordinary sixteenth receptacle, and it had belonged to the King of Spain. Mr. X. later brought this receptacle with its ashes to Duffey. There are very few men who keep their own ashes in a cigar can on their desks.

'The 'Devil in His Dungeon' was both historical fact and valid element of the folk unconscious during the one-thousand-year period from the years 946 to 1946. We will miss 'The Devil in His Dungeon'. He almost guaranteed that things were well in the upper part of the house. Nostalgia was born with the loosening of the Devil from his Crimean dungeon in 1946.

The word 'nostalgia' was used before that, but not in the same meaning. The world had lived through a thousand-year-long 'good old days' without knowing it. Now there will not be such good days, and there will not be much nostalgia for the trashy evil that we now live and breathe. 'Neustria' or 'Latter Neustria' are unhandy names for the real empire of the one thousand years. 'Christendom' was a handy and true name for the era and extent, but use of such words will not very long be permitted now. We enter a new era of slavery where only incoherence and evil will be permitted.

'The 'Waves of the Future', of which we have heard for near a lifetime now, are backward phenomena breaking onto the past. Hitler was indeed

a man of the future, or from the future, but he was raiding backwards into history. He correctly appraised that the province he was raiding backwards into, 'Greater Neustria', had a thousand year extent, but he was a man without direction in several ways. But surely he knew that he was traveling out of the future and impinging on a present and past from the wrong direction than himself. These are still with us, and they are achieving popular adoration. They show that the future will be so evil, but at the same time so cheap and contemptible a thing, that we need not fear to attack it.'

[Absalom Stein. *Notes on the Finnegan Cycle*.]

'The infectors or kindlers are themselves now stunned by the violence of the infection. They had gone in small groups for not much more than one hundred years. Since the metaphorical earlier release, they defiled mildly and they infected mildly, and they set their fires with small and flickering torches. Their doings seemed to be no more than token things, curious incursions of the several generations of the Sons of the Devil. But now there was effect. Believe me, they themselves are amazed by the present scope of the conflagration that has developed in the decade and a half since the deaths of the Papadiaboloï. It was almost as if the kindlers did not intend it.

'I knew many of these infestors, and I have data on all of them in my files. They were all incomplete and ineffectual persons, going about their dark business in almost somnambulistic fashion. They were dull and isolated blotches of paint, carrying no message and understanding none; but they have accidentally come together to form a clear and fearsome picture whose initial design was too deep to come from themselves. Perhaps, as has been said, their Father Himself really has been released this time. But the infestors were jagged little shards of base metal, brittle and soft and worthless, and with no conception of pattern. Together, though, they formed the strong brazen key which unlocks the iron door and released him who was confined for the day of the great thousand.'

[Melchisedech Duffey. *Letter to John Schultz*.]

'Jesus Christ was the total opposite of the revolutionary. He was the strong partisan of every jot and tittle of the law. After all, he made the law. The only way He could be a revolutionary was against Himself. But Jesus Barabbas (we now know that this was the correct name of the instigator) was a revolutionary all the way. Barabbas was a cheap-shot artist and a cheap-effect artist, as are his followers even till this day. It was Jesus Barabbas whom the 'Jesus People' follow, but they pretend that there was only one Jesus. This brings us to the question of 'Dark Followers' or 'Dark Companions' or 'Dark Correspondences', to groups and institutions, as well as to persons.

'The *Argo* sailed westward again and again from Illyria, but the Hadriaticus sometimes proved to be a sea without any far shore, and

sometimes it was a sea whose Western shore was not Italy. Oh certainly, I sailed on the *Argo* again and again and again. Do you not remember? I was Orpheus. We came to a wide variety of shores, named and nameless, but we did not come to any imaginary shores. All were real, and almost all of them were dark shadows of other shores and voyages. Don Juan made a good thing out of this: he pulled a frame-up and arranged that a shoddy double of him should go to hell in his place. And it happened so. But Don Juan was himself the shoddy double of a most elegant and most depraved sinner, and he was entrapped into serving an eternity in a most elegant and most painful hell for a man of sins too refined for himself ever to find pleasure in.

‘Casey Szymansky, out of compassion, traded souls with Stein and agreed to go to hell in his place. It was a successful deal from Stein's standpoint, and nothing succeeds like success. Stein came into Casey's brains and his talents as side effects of the same deal, and he grows grander and brighter while Casey shrivels. Stein had all the good things now, and they shall not be taken away from him.

‘I am tired, and I go into incoherence. I see true connections that I cannot see in moments of clarity, but I am not able to express them. The enemy has designed this obstacle for us. But the enemy may not know that I have a wife who was able to make clarity out of my incoherent expressions. Please do so, dear.’

[John Schultz. *Letter to his wife Marie.*]

‘Finnegan seeks death and does not find it. That is the main point of his puzzling quest. His own fleece was named *thanatos* and not *mallion*. Finnegan did not die in the ward in the hospital in the Philippines. But somebody died there in his name, and an army-doctor-friend of mine wrote me that Finnegan did die there in his presence, which letter I received the same day that Finnegan arrived in St. Louis. This amazed me, but it didn't seem to amaze Finnegan when I showed the letter to him.

‘Finnegan did not, apparently, die on the landing at Naxos, though X swears that one of the bodies was Finnegan's. But X himself spent the latter part of that same week in Finnegan's company. A thing like that would not bother X, but it bothers me.

‘Finnegan did not die in the cabin of the *Brunhilde*, but someone died there at the hands of Papadiabolous. He did not die at Tangier with Don Lewis, and yet there were two dead bodies at the bottom of the *tell*. He did not die at the hands of Saxon X. Seaworthy on Galveston Island, though Doll Delancy found a body she was sure was Finnegan's, and Miss Delaney knew Finnegan well. And possibly Finnegan did not die on the Marianao Coast near Havana. I believe, in spite of all the reports, that he is still alive. I also believe that I have run athwart of several tall-story artists, not the least of whom are the army doctor-friend of mine, Doll Delancy, and Finnegan himself. But the death quest has always been there.

'Finnegan is a double *phougaro* or funnel, the link between two different worlds. Yet there are characters (X, Biloxi Brannagan, Doll Delancy, Melchisedech Duffey) who have verifiable existence in both of the worlds. Finnegan himself believed that he was subject to topological inversion, that one of these worlds was always interior to him and the other world exterior to him, and that they sometimes exchange places. But where does that leave us who live in either of the two worlds? Are we not sometimes reduced to being no more than items in the mind of Finnegan?

'This topological inversion also occurs in the case of Melchisedech Duffey. In one form of the inversion, Melchisedech was the 'creator' of a dozen or so of us. Well, so he was then. I have felt it of myself and known it. But that was only in the least plausible of his contingent worlds.

'As to the voyages, there is the question of ships. Is the *Brunhilde* the first ship, or was it the third? Was it the original *Argo*? Or was it a later and unsanctified appearance of that ship, following the Bark in time? We have also the question of superimposed levels of experience in the Cruise of the *Brunhilde*. X says that not all of the events of that voyage happened to Finnegan in the first decade of the second antebellum period: he says that a strong substratum of them happened to Giulio Solli, the Monster Forgotten, the Father of Finnegan, in the decade before World War I, and that Finnegan has filial memory of them. The atmosphere of that earlier period *does* sometimes break in strongly on the voyage. But so much of this information depends on X who is not to be depended on.

'Finnegan is out of the Yellow Book of Lecan (the *Táin Bó Cúailinge*). This pre-supposed that Finnegan was identical with Fingal and also with Cú Chulainn. Well, Finnegan was capable of being all of them. To those interested in this line, I recommend Thurneysen's *Die Irische Helden-und-Königsage*. There was repetition of some of the incidents of the Seven Hidden Years of the life of Melchisedech Duffey and of some of the *Brunhilde*-Finnegan incidents. It is not even certain that Duffey (whose Seven Hidden Years were all before the birth of Finnegan or in his earliest childhood) has first claim on the anecdotes. Duffey knew Giulio Solli the father of Finnegan, and Duffey pirated and ransacked the mind of Giulio as he did so many others.

'I myself was present at several of the *Brunhilde*-Finnegan episodes (whether in the flesh or out of the flesh, I do not know: God knows); I was present at one meeting of Don Lewis and Manuel of which Finnegan knew nothing, so I could not have lifted this from Finnegan's mind. And I was present and watched them dine in death-like glitter on the Grand Canary. John Schultz also experienced a rapport with one of the *Brunhilde* incidents.

'The loves of Finnegan are as puzzling as his deaths. Most of them did not happen in the flesh or in time, though several puzzled women believed that they happened.

'We are all of us in legend. It was absolutely impossible that anyone should be in life who has not first been in Legend. But no one of us

understands his own legend. Mary Schaeffer says that I am the Wandering Jew, particularly in my writing style. I have not at all determined the exact relationship of the Argo Legend to the Finnegan Cycle.'

[Absalom Stein. *Notes on the Argo Legend and Further Notes on the Finnegan Cycle.*]

'Finnegan is a ghost, of course. Which of us is not? But he has the peculiar habit of coming and and inhabiting people. All the Fivers understand this, and they are not spooked by the spook, except Casey a little bit. Have pity on all poor people who never had a ghost of their own! Vincent says that Finnegan is the third person in our marriage, sometimes inhabiting him, and more often me; that Finnegan was both Anima and Animus to us. Vincent has been reading Jung, and oh my poor husband, you have not the brains for him!

'It scared Stein the first time he experienced a Finnegan Visitation. He believed that it was a death visitation, and he made note of the time and date. It was the afternoon of Passion Sunday of the year 1948. Well, why shouldn't Finnegan be both a person and a ghost at the same time if he have a talent for it? I have that talent myself.

'I played a part in one of the episodes. I was the Oread Anemotrephes in the sequence on the Mountain. I was clearly conscious of it all: I played it like a comic skit at the old Star and Garter. I was displeased at the way the other two Oreads handled their parts. It's the ethnicity of them, I think. We get quite a few Greek girls at the Star and Garter in one act or another. They're kind of pretty, they're kind of sexy, but they can't act. Simplistic as hell they are, and kind of wooden. I don't care if they did invent acting: they're no good at it.

'I told Oriebates that if she couldn't do better than that, why hell, I'd get Mary Newshee out of the popcorn booth to play it. The Star and Garter had already been sold when this happened, and Mary Newsbee was married and living on Walnut Street downtown; but that didn't seem to be the case in the episode. It was not a dream though. It was a detached experience.

'What puzzles me was that Duffey knows so little about such things at first hand. But he catches on fast. He pirates minds and gets the stuff out of them and pretends that he knew it all the time, That Maker Man, he just doesn't have it.'

[Teresa Piccone Stranahan. *Private Letter.*]

'Showboat wrote that? How did she know that Finnegan was a ghost? He is, though. But Finnegan and Showboat were not lovers ever. Their intimacy was of another sort. Finnegan was likely not a real lover of anyone ever, unless he could find another Teras to carry on with. With me, he was a ghost-lover. Well, am I a fornicator thereby? Not I. Ours was not a thing that can be put into flesh, nor into words.

'Of the adventures, oh, I was on all the original adventures myself! I was one of the Argo Company, yes, but the 'Adventures' were variants. I know what Finnegan told me, what X told me, what Melchisedech told me. There are some of the identities that haven't properly been unraveled though. One of the Papadiabouloi was the same person as the Private Gregory in that hospital ward in the Philippines. How many persons in the world can be expected to have such great purple pumpkins for heads?

'Teresa is an analog to Anastasia Demetriades, but she resented Anastasia. She rejoiced privately when Anastasia died. I am the same person as Doll Delancy, according to the account of X, but Doll wasn't too much according to other accounts. She was like myself, but with the brains knocked out.

'As to Melchisedech Duffey, at rare times he becomes identical with every one of his creations. I have felt him in myself as myself. It isn't simply that he's a robber of minds, for he's a bit more. Whether or not he is our maker, he is our awakener and our mentor.

!How odd of God
To puff the Duff!

'We are a mutually creative group of about thirteen people. God sets such groups according to whim, and to prevent elitism from creeping in. That's why there's a Duffey-type at the head of every group — to teach humility. We are all about one-thirteenth Duffey. We think about that whenever we are inclined to be thunderstruck by our own genius. In any random company of a dozen or so persons, one or two of them will be already dead, but with no real division between. Do the dead know that they are dead and in purgatory? Or rather, do we know whether we are dead or not? Whether we are in the flesh or not? Whether we are in the world or not?

'We were given Finnegan because he was part Teras, so all of us will be part Teras through him. This keeps us from being overly proud of being human. All who have dealt with Finnegan have acquired a rich intellectual stratum that rests somewhere between the conscious and the unconscious. This stratum can't be brought out. It can't be displayed. It can't be examined on any terms except its own. It melts away, and sometimes one fears that it is lost. Finnegan expresses part of this west-of-the-moon intellect in his paintings. But all his paintings fly away to obscure collections, since we cannot afford to own them for long. He expresses part of it in his words, but his words can never be recalled when he isn't present. Finn says that this inaccessibility comes from his having Teras brains and we having people brains. All of them, Casey and Henri and Hans and Absalom, pass themselves off as being smart by cashing in a little bit of the hoard that Finnegan bestows on us. Finnegan was the most talented and intelligent man anywhere in spite of his ape-brained vagaries and antics. He was my beloved forever, and he was Duffey's Central Creation. Well, back to rebuilding the world.

[Dotty Yekouris. *Unmailed Letter, no addressee given.*]

'It is a continuing mystery how a very small group, usually less than a dozen persons, has been able to save the world from destruction for several decades now. We have been doing exactly that, but the margin becomes closer and closer.

[Mary Virginia Schaeffer]

2

Now it is into the New Orleans Scene, in the time-defying stasis of Duffey, which moves back and forth through the years. But, in those first two weeks or so, before Finnegan flew the coop that first time, the scene wasn't quite in stasis yet.

Duffey and Finnegan and a man named Zabotski who owned the building were working one morning very early. It was the fourth or fifth morning dating from the founding of the Pelican Press in New Orleans. Early morning, yes, it had just struck midnight on the little wooden clock that Zabotski himself had made. The instituting of the Pelican Press was for the publishing of a journal called *The Bark* for the renewal of the world, and for the publishing of other things also.

Zabotski was a gross and sometimes even an unpleasant man, but he was a fine artist. This combination is frequent. Zabotski was an ethnic artist. The art of the Philistines is the most enduring and the most underrated of all the ethnic arts. And Zabotski liked to busy himself at all hours, and he was a very sociable man. Such hyperactive and socializing inclinations are often found in completely useless people. But Zabotski owned the building, and he considered that he had certain rights of entry.

Duffey and Finnegan and Zabotski were rebuilding and reappointing a large room there: it would be the press room,

and it would be the everything room. And, at the same time that Duffey was doing this, he was also making a recorder flute. And Finnegan, while working on the rebuilding of the room, was also painting a large picture. Actually, in their own ways, they were about the business of rebuilding the world.

Duffey would also have his 'Walk-In Art Bijou' as well as his pawn shop in this building.

The recorder, a musical instrument, an old type of flute such as had been made and played back in mid-millennium, was being put together out of walnut wood and Philippine mahogany. The stop-keys and filigree were being made out of bright brass. Since he had made his first banjo, Duffey had held in contempt all persons who play on instruments that they haven't made themselves. And the newest of Duffey's tall dreams was for a flute band to give an occasional alternative to the string band that he had found already thriving there in the neighborhood and had joined.

"There was a report on the radio, on the 'Late, Late, Late News That Was Different', about a prisoner being released in the Crimea last Saturday," Duffey said. "It got comic treatment. What else could it get? But it confirms some of the things that Henri and Absalom and others (myself, for instance) have been saying."

The picture that Finnegan was painting was a horizontal eight feet by four feet piece, and it was in the Finnegan 'Yellow Period' style. There was a leaping sophistication in its handling, but it handled primitive materials, ice-age animals and cave-man settings.

"I get my own reports from the Old Country," Zabotski said. "This isn't entirely comic, though there has always been a folk-comic element in tales of the *Chort*. This story is a simple one. The Devil was released from the underground dungeon which many people did not know underlay the peninsula. He came out of there light-blinded but in possession of most of his faculties. He stretched himself to a

great height. He got ten kilos of balm from a pharmacy and rubbed it on the galls that had been made by the irons on his neck and wrists and ankles. He gave cryptic answers to reporters. 'What would you say would be the most important effect of your release?' a reporter asked. 'They shall know it, now that I have returned,' the Devil quoted. 'Wasn't it Achilles who said that first?' the reporter inquired. 'No, I said it first, a long time ago', the Devil said. 'He may have had it from me. I have the lever and the hammer boys. You will give me a good press, or you will run into the worst difficulties that you ever thought of. 'Whenever did you not get a good press, since there has been a press?' one of the reporters said. 'That's true', the Devil admitted. Let's keep it that way.' I should have quite a few more details of it soon. A cousin of mine was present and witnessed it all."

"Ah, I'm afraid that we *will* know it, now that he is back."

"Where do you have your reports from?" Duffey asked.

"Oh, from my own radio. But it's a wireless that is literally without wires, and that speaks only to Slavic ears, and not to all of them. Cut me one more stud to the length of those others, Finnegan."

Finnegan sawed another stud of seven feet and one and one quarter inches. Finnegan did not measure and he did not square, but he cut to perfect fit. This was because he was an artist. For the first of the studs, he had measured the distance with his eye, and he had got it right. For the others, as Zabotski called for them, he cut them without looking. Why not? He had already looked. Does an artist have to look twice?

"Finnegan, I will hate you for that forever," Duffey said, "and I will hate you for accepting it without blinking, Zabotski. You are working rule-free and not by jot and tittle. I was once the best carpenter in St. Louis, and I am still one of the nine great carpenters in the world, but I always measure carefully. My wife was starting down from Chicago this morning, with a surplus army four-by-four truck with all our

possessions not otherwise stored. My wife has never seen either of you, except through my mind and at a distance of hundreds of miles, but she has you both sized up perfectly. 'Tell that Zabotski that he had better lose fifty pounds,' she writes 'between the eyes'."

"I exercise up there constantly," Zabotski said. "There's a little fat there, I suppose, but oh the great extent and depth of fine and lean brains too! What does that second reindeer say, Finnegan? Oh, yes, I get it now."

Sometimes Zabotski stuck his huge hands into Duffey's flutemaking, but it was hard to fault him there. He was good with both wood and brass. He had brought some of his own equipment from next door, a small furnace (they would need it anyhow for making and repairing many parts for the press), a lathe, a mortising machine, a wood-turners' outfit, a brass-smelting arrangement with small drop-hammers.

And sometimes Zabotski stuck his big hands into the picture that Finnegan was painting, spreading globs of impossible pigment with a palette knife, and making possible some effects that even Finnegan had hesitated over.

But should people whose purpose was the rebuilding of the world be taking time out for picture-painting and flute-making? They should, yes. You'll never build a world right without such things.

"Here it will make a difference in the color," Zabotski said. "The purpose will make a difference. Why are you painting the picture, Finnegan?"

"This one was for money. It will go to a fraternity house where they should be smart enough to catch the lines. Dotty says that we will need quite a bit of money to get things rolling."

"Oh, for money. Then it is this way." And Zabotski caused an effect that would enhance the money value. Zabotski knew all about the enhancing of money. It was no wonder that Zabotski was an artist, or that Finnegan was. Almost

everybody in that block was an artist. There are not three brocks in all of New Orleans with more artists living in them. Zabotski wouldn't have rented that building to Dotty and Duffey and their bunch if there hadn't been an artist, Finnegan, among them. And Zabotski, as one of the foremost Philistine artists in the world, had high standing in the art colonies. "Why are there so many ungainly butterflies and birds hovering about the mouths of the animals and people in your painting, Finnegan?" Duffey asked. "And what is the complicated figuration of the fur and hair of the animals?"

"Oh poor rotten Duffey!" Finnegan cried in amazement. "That's talk, Duffey, talk. Don't you know talk, don't you know words and statements when you see them? Do you know that lepidopterists have discerned a whole branch of Pleistocene lepidoptera rock paintings of Chamonix and St. Zermatto and Guebwiller? But the lepidopterists are mistaken in their own specialty. Those supposed butterflies around the mouths of people and animals in the rock paintings aren't butterflies at all."

"What are they then, Neanderthal Artist Finnegan?" Duffey wanted to know.

"Balloons," Finnegan said. "They are cartoonist-style, speech-and-song balloons. They are the words and the statements coming out of the mouths of the people and beasts. They are all in the original and complex language."

"You lie, Finnegan," Duffey said recklessly, and he left his flute-making for a while to put up a cranky little shelf in the rebuilding structure of the room. "I know that the cave and wall paintings at St. Zermatto and Chaminix and Guebwiller were all done by Neanderthal men. And the Neanderthals had neither speech nor writing."

"Oh Holozoic Hell, Duffey! Of course we had them, and we have them yet!" Finnegan exploded. "These birds and butterflies, on the cave paintings and the wall paintings, and on my painting on canvas here, are message blurbs

being spoken by the creatures. They look more ornate than do contemporary cartoonists' balloons because we used to write on both the inside and the outside of the balloon. No, they aren't butterflies, and they aren't birds. They are words and sentences of written commentary. And you, Duffey, are left on the outside. You don't even know what the second reindeer answered the first. Even Zabotski caught that one finally. This is rich language that we use in our paintings. Language began in complexity and perfection, and then it degenerated into our present simplicity and poverty."

"You don't even know the meaning of poverty," Duffey said. "Not in this, not in anything. The lack of comprehension of poverty is at the root of so many of our troubles. Certain degenerate and evil persons have begun a 'war on poverty'. They are the same persons who relentlessly wage the 'war on obedience' and the 'war on chastity'. Waging a war on poverty is like waging a war on life or on goodness. Pay attention. This is a Duffey Lecture. It will not be repeated."

"Of course it will be repeated, many times," Finnegan said.

"There is something wrong with an economic and social system that cannot generate real poverty," Duffey stated, "when poverty is unblessed and no longer to be found, then the whole world comes unblessed. We will pray for holy poverty, and we will hardly find it. This lack of poverty imperils the Great Pot itself."

"Maybe the Devil will bring back poverty, now that he was released," Finn said.

"The Devil? What should he have to do with Holy Poverty other than to defame it?" Duffey asked, "and that is what he will do. In the years to come, you will hear endless defamations of poverty. You will hear it maligned and cursed; you will hear it slandered and classed as an evil. You will even hear 'cures' proposed for it. Some of these cures will be proposed by persons really wanting to find cures for various

degradations which they miscall poverty. But also, there will be absolute and violent attacks on poverty itself. Look closely at the people who mount these attacks. They may be the most distinguished of senators and bishops and mouth-brokers and enterprising and diligent self-servers. They may be the fashionable Judas Priests and accommodations-persons. These things they may be on the surface, but underneath they are devils, every one of them."

"Duffey, I've known poverty," Zabotski said. "It has rough edges."

"It's just that you're not holy enough to see it clearly, Zabotski, and you may be calling other things by its holy name. The Devil, more than ever now, will be bringing in things to be called 'poverty' by the ignorant: sordidness, trashiness, degradation, debasement, deprivation, animality, certain of the deliriums, squalidness, shabbiness of spirit, debauchery, barrenness, hopelessness. But there is no way that the Devil can bring back Holy Poverty to us.

"There remains one solution to all economic and social and personal ills, to all the traumas caused by sin and false poverty: 'Ask and you shall receive'. That takes care of everything. There is no case of persons asking in good faith and not receiving, and the Lord promises that there will not be. There are so many persons who would like to find blessing in true giving, and so few who are available for the receiving. What if the Pot stands full forever, and nobody will ask for its Holy Slumgullion?

"Oh, you win, guys," Duffey said then, turning to the Finnegan picture. "Some days I really am dim. I caught it finally."

"Caught what, old Duff?" Finnegan asked him.

"What the second reindeer answered to the first reindeer in your painting. It's pretty good."

The Great Pot Itself was an intimate part of 'Project Rebuilding the World'. This project began with that fat-to-overflowing, young, Louisiana-swamp Frenchman, Henri or

Henry Salvatore. (Where his name was given 'Henri' it was pronounced 'Onree' in the Cajun fashion; where it was given 'Henry' it was pronounced 'Henry'.) Salvatore had once had a maritime vision and heard a salt-spray voice telling him that his was the responsibility of rebuilding the world. Henri didn't know how to do it, but he did have a talent for delegating assignments. He delegated the Rebuilding of the World to Finnegan, to Duffey, to Stein, to Mary Virginia, to Dotty, to those first and mainly. Then he went off to a place where they were supposed to teach the rebuilding-of-the-world trade. (He then became to all of them 'Henry the Merry Monk' though he intended to become a secular priest.) Those to whom he gave the assignments, to work until he should come back, didn't know how to rebuild the world either. But each of them had several little catch-notions of it that might serve until a better idea came along. Among the notions were 'A Journal', 'An Institute', and 'A Pot'.

The Pot belonged to Zabotski. Zeb had once been a chemist or experimenter of some sort, and he had used this big, glass-lined, one-thousand-gallon capacity pot or crock for some distillation experiments. Duffey asked for it, and Zabotski knocked out a section of the wall and brought it into the big room.

Here was part of the canonical account of the affair: "Duffey rigged gas burners under it and filled it with water. He announced that he would keep the Big Pot boiling forever. He got a priest from St. Katherine's to bless it." Such was the basis and founding of it. That had been the day before this. The idea was that people could put vegetables or meat or fish into the pot to boil, or that God would put these things into it secretly. And the resulting slumgullion in the pot would be available to poor people forever. But, in a full day, only six persons had taken rich soup out of the spigots of the pot, and all of these had been impelled by curiosity and not by poverty. None of them had been poor enough to be members of Holy Poverty. There had to be poor

people somewhere in that city and that world. Where were they, where, where?

"There has got to be a turning point for the pot," Duffey said. "Ah, that bird there in your painting, Finn, with what looks like a smaller bird in front of its mouth, is that—?"

"What you take for a smaller bird is, of course, a bird-cry in its balloon," Finnegan said. "It's a specialized bird, so it's saying a specialized message."

"All right, what is it saying, Finn?"

"It is saying, 'When the horse gets here, we will eat. And when the man gets here, then we will really eat'. That's the kind of bird it is, you see." This, like everything else that Finnegan ever said, was prophetic.

The Widow Waldo came by then.

"I saw your light on and came in," she said. The Widow Waldo never slept. She looked constantly for persons to visit with. In the middle of the night it was always this, 'I saw your light on and came in'. In the day time it was 'Your curtains were up so I was pretty sure you were awake, so I came in.' The Widow was a wonderful and fair person. She brought a little jar of a new kind of coffee and made coffee for them all in the percolator. She had little cakes for them, cakes that she had just made. She talked in cadenced sharing for a while. Then she put three pounds of good hamburger meat into the pot and left. The Widow Waldo was moderately rich.

But it was about a month after this until the Pot managed to give itself its peculiar character and signature and flavor that meant that it would be a going concern. The first large animal to go into the Pot had been a horse, an ancient buggy-pulling horse that had hauled people around the French Quarter. It had died, and its owner had given it to the Pot. He had also given its old straw hat with its two ear holes in it to go in the Pot. This old straw hat had not finished living its life yet. It floated on the slumgullion of the Pot for

weeks and even months and gave a character to it. People liked to look in to see if it was still floating there. This was the beginning of character and signature and flavor, but it wasn't the outstanding thing yet.

The Pot weighed a thousand pounds empty and nine thousand pounds full. It was ordained that it would never be empty again, once water and slum were put into it. A hundred bushels of barley had been put into it very early, and that gave the slum long-lasting bulk and a pleasant flavor. Later, rice would be used more than barley. Salt and onions, rough fish, country herbs and weeds were added constantly. But slum doesn't become slumgullion until a 'big meat' goes into it, and the horse was the first of that. Then there was a cow or two. (The six persons a day had increased to about six hundred after the first week or so, and quite soon went to several thousand.) Alligators went into the Pot then, and the famous Alligator Tail Soup was served on the side for several days. Quite a few rabbits and birds went in, and sometimes a sheep or goat or cow. Potatoes and turnips went in, and whatever the green grocers had of wilted or spoiled remnant.

There were a few razzers and jazzers around who would make brash comments about the Big Pot. And the jazzers were the pivot of the turning point when it came. Several of the jazzers fished three large bones out of the pot one day, and one *very* large bone. They made a big noise about what they had fished out, and anyone who was familiar with humans could see that these were conspicuously human bones. What would this do to the fame of the Pot?

Things like that can go either way. They may be taken in good humor or in bad. But in this case, there was strong suspicion, and grounds for it had been seen, that those jazzers who had fished the bones out of the Pot were the same persons who had put them in. These persons, in fact, were three medical students. And when they struck next, with the garish sign painted on the Pot, and painted tightly

so that it would remain bright almost forever, "Cannibal Duffey's Irish Restaurant" , it was taken in good humor by almost everybody.

And something did improve both the actual taste and the reputation of the stew right about then. It may have been the human parts in it; it may have been something else. The stew acquired character and individuality, and it would retain these things forever.

And, as Dotty Yekouris said, what if an unfortunate cadaver did (now and then) find its way into the Pot? You've got to expect things like that in a large city. Everybody contributes what he can to the general weal, but some persons can contribute only themselves.

Duffey and Finnegan and Zabotski didn't finish rebuilding the room that early morning. That project, like the larger project of which it was a part, would go on for decades at least. They all had their distractions, for one thing. Zabotski, for instance, was courting the Widow Waldo.

Henri Salvatore had entered a seminary to learn how to rebuild the world. But he had put other people at the task in the meanwhile. Duffey and Dotty Yekouris began to publish a little paper named *The Bark* (in the sense of a boat or a ship). The first organ to take notice of *The Bark* (except for a one-shot burlesque of it named *The Bite*, and that was done by Absalom Stein with vinegar and kindness) was Casey's *The Crock* in Chicago. These two journals joined battle over the issue of how the world should be rebuilt. Duffey went about the project in various ways, and he picked up some allies. Stein had come down to New Orleans just at launching time, and Finnegan flew the coop and left. The two events were related. Dotty Yekouris was desolate when Finnegan left. Well, he would be leaving a lot, and she had a lot of desolation in store for her.

Letitia Duffey had arrived with the cream of the Duffeys' worldly possessions and with enough cash to carry things on

for a while.

Mary Virginia Schaeffer belonged to the Schaeffer family that owned the Red Dog Motor Freight which ran from Galveston and Houston to Morgan City and New Orleans. It also covered Baton Rouge and Shreveport and Port Arthur and Orange and Beaumont. Mary Virginia transferred herself to the New Orleans terminal and worked with Dotty on *The Bark* and on other things, as well as for the Red Dog Motor Freight.

Soon, Margaret Stone would come down from Chicago to set them on fire.

And, one of these months or years, Salvation Sally would come from Australia to aid in the Salvation. But rebuilding the world is a difficult task even for a crew that contains a Fat Frenchman and a Magician-Sorcerer-Magus, and a Dotty Yekouris, and sometimes a Finnegan.

Duffey also formed associations with other persons who were building or inventing worlds or moments or situations or scenes. There was Joe Smith the vagabond painter who had begun, in Galveston, the famous triptych of Dotty O'Toole that Finnegan would finally finish. Joe Smith did not ever finish anything, but he had a disturbing excellence to everything that he did, and it was a necessary condition that every piece he did should be incomplete. He had left more than a dozen unfinished masterpieces with art dealer Duffey.

There was Adam Scanlon of New York and Groben of Chicago. There were Rita Tinder, Gilbert Brisbane, Crystal O'Boyle (the untraditional glass goblet lady), Neil Holway, Dorcas Whiteduck, Wesley Neosha, Pedro San Carlo, Jessica Shrike (that princess of porcelain), Mary Ann Goldbrook, Hugh Thatcher (the Yellow Kid), Humphrey Speckle, Peggy Munster, Elroy Redheart (wrought-iron work was not dead but only sleeping, and Elroy was waking it up with his hammering on its white-hot iron), Timothy McMasters, Alvin Huckster, John Bently Oatmeal (the Renaissance of Pottery had begun with him), Kester Coogan. Oh, those are some of

the artists of the neighborhood and the world (*regione et orbe*) whose work Duffey had for sale very early, and whose creative ideas contributed mightily to the Rebuilding Thesis of Duffey and his company.

These were the most talented artists to be found. At least five of them were among the hundred greatest American artists, and two of them (Adam Scanlon and the fly-the-coop Finnegan) were among the two greatest.

Duffey knew from the first that his part in rebuilding the world would be carried out largely within his own vocation as Art Dealer, yes, and Pawn Broker. He could influence the world uncommonly from the first of these vantages. There are flaming moments and scenes in every job, and the world can turn either way at every flame-point. Duffey may have realized sooner than anyone, except the Adversary Himself, the rabid and overwhelming attack that would soon be launched against all the arts. His Walk-In Art Bijou would be a flexible fortress against all such assaults.

Duffey didn't acquire all these clients immediately, but he had them all quickly, and he added and added and added to his list: Heloise Tantrum a really good sculptor, John Claxton who painted on slabs of slate, people like that. It must be understood that, while other characters and groups were following out their lives in normal sequence of the years, Duffey was in a creative stasis that disregarded the years. So he moved back and forth through them henceforth.

Duffey was continually struck by the fact that there was so much good stuff in the world. On the surface, Duffey had seemed more of a pessimist than the young people he was associated with. But, in the creative interior of him, that wasn't so. In rebuilding the world there were plenty of good stones available for reuse. It might be necessary to make only token acquirements from quarries. Or there might be enough stone so that none at all need to be quarried.

Another ally or counter-ally who came to help them or to harm them (to affect them anyhow) was Mr. X, that running rumor of a man. We have now arrived at the time of his first coming to them in New Orleans. Bagby had written from St. Louis that X was coming. Letitia had asked several times when he would arrive. And Duffey had never heard of him. No, he hadn't heard of him, but he remembered something about a hokey-pokey, Italian, push-cart confection man from when Duffey was about three years old. The first of the talismans had been given out by Duffey then, but what had that earliest of the talismans fruited in?

Duffey had been working late one night. Dotty had said 'Put him on the sofa when he comes; everything else is full.' 'Put whom on the sofa, dear?' Duff had asked. 'You are the most exasperating man I ever knew,' Dotty said, and she went off to bed. And half an hour later, the sleepy Letitia arose.

"Aren't you going to let him in?" she asked Duffey inconsequently.

"Let whom in, butterfly?" he asked her.

"The X quantity at the door."

"Oh, I didn't hear anybody knock."

"What? You really don't understand that he would be too shy to knock?"

Letitia threw the door open. She threw her arms wide in the famous Koch gesture, and they remained wide and empty. But they couldn't be allowed to remain so.

"Dammit, X, I'm one of you," she cried. She reached out and captured and enfolded the little man and gave him the famous biggest kiss in town. Oh, but then he melted out of

her arms like tacky vapor, and re-formed at a safer place with a table between him and the danger.

"Oh, X, X," Letitia laughed. "I thought it was only your wife that you were so terrified of. Is it all women?"

"No, no, that was not terror, gracious lady," X said. "That was something else."

X was at the same time a happy-looking and a wistful-looking clown. He seemed to be about the age of Duffey, probably a couple of years younger than the century. He was a mid-nineteenth-century, north Italian type though, a small nobleman come onto small days, wrapped in tattered elegance, and full of secret information.

"I am X," he said. "Need I say more? I know everyone. I saw your Finnegan (he was in Chicago then) and others there. I saw the Pope in Rome and he asked to be remembered to you. He worries about your soul, you having so many feet in so many different worlds. I saw Levi van Wei in Paris and he said that he could take a couple more Finnegan pieces. I saw your sister, gracious lady Letitia, and she said 'Don't tell her anything; make her guess'. I could not get to see the president. I don't trust him anyhow; why should I? I saw Fat Henri. I saw Teresa when I was in St. Louis with Bagby. But, my time being so limited, I can see only the most important people. I saw Sebastian Hilton and the Countess in Carpathia. I hope they will be able to do something about the situation there. I do not want to travel under false colors. I name you the fine and important people whom we both know, but I do not state that any of them would recommend me for anything. Really, I don't know who would ever recommend me."

"I would," said Letitia.

"I would," said Dotty Yekouris who could always wake from the deepest sleep on the arrival of any real personage. "You have come to the right place, X. For about four days, that is, you have come to the right place here. Have I missed anything important, little person?"

X talked for about four hours then. And he talked pretty steadily for the four days that he was with them that first time.

"Doofey, I have two things here of the most utter importance," he said after a while. When he had first come in, he had put a black box on the table there. And he had also set a canister or urn beside the box. They looked like art objects carefully wrapped.

"Both of these contain some things that you have seen before, Doofey," X said. "Both of them contain things that are part of you, both in your past and in your future." In this black box there was a gray box, and in the gray box there was a brown box. And he removed the gray box from the black and the brown box from the gray.

"Now we're really getting somewhere," said Letitia. "But I know that box."

"Where's the red box?" Duffey asked.

"Oh, you mean as in the magic act," X rose to the allusion. "Yes, the red box is the one that appears and disappears. You can put it in any of the larger boxes, and close and then open the cover again, and the red box will be gone. But then it will be in one of the other boxes when you open that. I hadn't seen or thought of the red box for years, but I believe I can still do the trick. The brown box was full of other things too important to play tricks with."

"The brown box is quite red enough," Letitia said.

"Doofey, was the red box in the black box or in the gray box?" X asked.

"In the black box," said Duffey.

"No, you are wrong," said X. "It is in the gray box." And X opened both of them. But it was X who was wrong and Duffey had been right. The red box was in the black box.

"I was known as the Great X-Capo when I was in Vaudeville," X said. "I did magic tricks as well as escapes, but what you did was not a trick."

"No, it was real," Duffey said with some pride in his powers.

"Doofey, you more than anyone in the world should know what is in the brown box," X said. "I have brought it from Chicago to you. Oh!"

The red box was gone suddenly, but in its place there were three red roses. A flamboyant car drove up outside at the same moment.

"It does not matter," X said. "The red box was an intrusion by you, Doofey. It has gone back to whence it came, to nowhere. But the roses are nice."

X took the three red roses in his hands. He gave one of them to Letitia and one of them to Dotty Yekouris. The flamboyant man from the car came in, and X gave him the third red rose.

"You are Hugo Stone the infamous communist from Chicago," X said.

"A Red Rose for the Red," said Absalom Stein, for it was he. "Is there a card on me in the Brown Box that you bring to Duffey?"

"Certainly, certainly, you are well documented there in all detail."

"What's the last entry on my card?" Stein asked.

"A question mark, put there by myself," X said. "For some reason, you haven't been acting like the infamous Communist lately."

"Oh, Casey Szymansky and I have traded souls," Stein said. "Sort of traded. Sort of souls. It's done more than you would imagine."

"Then Casey is now the infamous Communist in Chicago?" X asked.

"Exactly. And I'm the good guy," Absalom said.

"I thought that Casey had been building up a history of funniness lately," X mused, "Oh well, that was easily explained. Now in this brown box—"

"It doesn't belong to me, X," Duffey said. "It belongs to *The Crock*, and *The Crock* belongs to Casey and his friends. Did you steal it?"

"Certainly I stole it. They were not properly using the information that is in it. As to the other item, it was a pottery cigar box or urn with ashes in it."

"Ashes?"

"Utter ashes. They belong to you, Doofey. I said that they *belonged* to you. Do you know in what sense it was that they belong to you?"

"Oh, those ashes! Yes, I know in what sense they're mine. I don't take up much room when I'm cremated and canned, do I? Did you steal them too?"

"I took them furtively, but it was not really stealing, since they belong to you in every possible sense. I knew that I would someday become a buddy, even an agent of yours. And, as there are so few of us who travel from that country to this, I thought I'd better bring them to you. But it was tricky, I tell you, Doofey, bringing them out of there."

"Is it too gauche for me to inquire how these could be your ashes, and you still alive and functional?" Dotty Yekouris asked.

"An anachronism, that's what it is," Duffey said.

"An anachronism, that's what you are, Duffey," Dotty said.

The brown box contained index cards scribbled full of information. Most of the cards had been filled up by Duffey himself. Others of them had been filled in by other persons, including X.

"It is information on the plotters, on the infiltrates," X said.

"I know what it is," Duffey told him, "but I'm not as interested in it as I once was."

"Then get interested in it once more," X lectured him. "It was a sort of game before. Now it becomes serious. It is in

only a sketchy manner that you know what it is, even though you made many of the notes. This is the hard information on the diabolists who infiltrate the People and the State and the Church. You will notice one new card of fluorescent or phosphorescent or diabolical orange-red that was not in the file while you had it. And you will notice that this card, while apparently three times the other cards in all dimensions, yet fits in neatly with the others in this small box. It is an illusion that was more than optical."

"I understand the illusion. I could probably do it myself," Duffey said. "But why add such a card at this time?"

"Because he is loose and working at this time. If the Lady Letitia will pour coffee for me and brandy for the rest of you, I will tell you about the recent release of this person or entity. I was an eyewitness."

"I have heard of several hundred eyewitnesses to it, and they do not agree," Absalom Stein said.

"That's possible," X agreed. "There were quite several hundred persons present at the release, and not one of them was the sort of person who would keep quiet about things. As to the accounts not agreeing, well it was mostly a disagreeable business. Did you field that one, Miss Dotty? It was in the nature of a joke."

"It was a lovely joke, X, and you are a lovely person," Dotty said. "Tell us about the great moment when history was unmade and the Devil was released from his prison."

So X quickly went into his account of the incident.

"The peninsula with its oblast was known to the Greeks as the Tauric Chersonese and to the Romans as the Euxine Chersonese. The Goths called it simply Cherson. At the time of the imprisonment, the peninsula was owned partly by the Kingdom of Kiev and partly by the Principality of Tmutarakan, an advance host of the Khanate of the Golden Horde. So the Prisoner, though brought from Aachen by Christians, was delivered first to Mohammedans on the peninsula, and was then given over to Devil worshipper

allies for the actual prisoning. This was in the year 946 or 947. The Devil always had a small group of Devil worshippers as his guards. The peninsula is called Krym by the Russians and Crimea by ourselves. But it was also known as The Prison (*Phylake, Carcer*) for more than a thousand years before the actual imprisonment.

“The Crimean Mountains rise to an altitude of over a thousand feet near the south coast of the peninsula, and the prison itself was dug down a thousand feet below sea level and below the roots of the mountains.

“Notables had been coming to the vicinity for several years, to check on the time of the release and to consult with the imprisoned Devil. The Yalta Conference was based on such daily, in fact hourly, consultations with the Devil by all the principals of the conference. Very much was promised at that conference. It might seem to a disinterested observer, of whom there can be none, that all the promises were very one-sided. They were pledged to further the Devil's work if only the Devil would come out of his prison after his release was obtained.

“In the imprisonment bit, the Devil, an evil king, was playing a part mostly played by good kings or leaders, the part of the imprisoned or enchanted or trance-sleeping leader. Barbarossa, Alaric, Brian Boru, The Cid, Arthur, all sleep in enchantment or imprisonment somewhere, with their loyal subjects waiting and hoping for their awakening or release. But the Devil, they say, did not sleep very much during his imprisonment.

“This past spring was not a pleasant one on the Crimea, as it attempted to return to being a pleasure resort after the war years. It was chilly right up to that fateful last Saturday of May, and yet there was a flocking of notables there such as has not been seen for many lifetimes. They all just wanted to go to the Crimea to enjoy the beaches, now that peace had returned, they said. People with futures were there. They obtained and confirmed their futures by being

there. Here were the architects of all the new realms. They came to adore, and to receive their patents in the nobility. There were disproportionate numbers of Catholic Cardinals and lesser Clergy among them. There were disproportionate large numbers of leaders of Jewry. And the Liberal Consensus was especially well represented, and most overly represented of all was the floating world of the intelligentsia, or the cognoscenti, or the gnostics. There were many of the venerable and long-lasting advisors to premiers and presidents and prime ministers and kings. They had waited so long to see their real King! Now the older of them would be able to look on him and expire.

“Representatives of all the decadent and goatish arts were there. Decadence would be *in* now, and centrality (except for the dark centrality) would be out. And there would be deformed counterparts of every one of the bright arts.

“Only one thousand persons had permits to be present, and my own permit was number nine hundred and eighty-two. I have masqueraded as many different men, and my permit was made out to one of my old masquerade persons. It was only because of the large complement of fraud that has always been in me that I could be there undetected.

“The Devil came out, and I knew him. I had seen him before and talked to him. But I hadn't talked to him, apparently, in his real flesh that was imprisoned there, but in a sort of effigy flesh. This brings us to the question: What will the Devil be able to do in his real flesh that he was not able to do in his effigy flesh? The next few decades may devote themselves to answering this question.

“He came out. He was of a puzzling size. One moment he seemed giant-sized and the next moment he was merely man-sized. Several of the Cardinals prostrated themselves and adored him. They sang ‘Te Satanum’.

“The Devil was misshapen. By that he may always be known. It is hard to describe, but *everything* about him was

out of proportion. He is the enemy of proportion and shape. He is slant-faced and everywhere slanted.

"The Devil signed out in the release book. The Devil cannot write in script. He prints in deformed and scatter-set characters: one letter large, one small, one up, one down, one in one color, one in another. Whenever you see proclamations or posters or models for the young to draw by in such deformed letters and words, you will know that they are really in the hand of the Devil.

"People began to speak in squalid tongues, in a reverse pentecostalism. The Devil stretched and scratched. His servitors began to rub balm on his shackle-sores.

"He spoke about his plans. He said that he would hold about ten thousand meetings a year with select groups, and that every one of the meetings would be a key meeting of utmost importance. He would preach and teach defamation. He would preach the scenic and crooked way. Of all things that stand, he would say, 'Pull them down!'. Of all things alive, he would say, 'Kill them!'.

"I have the names of all one thousand persons who were present at the release of the Devil. There are a few more of their names than that in the cross-index, as many of the devious persons travel under a variety of names. I will have this most secret list and index brought here if you will publish it in *The Bark*."

"I don't know," said Melchisedech Duffey.

"No. I'm sorry, X, but we will not publish it," said Dotty Yekouris.

Ah, but during the next several days, they did have a good time playing "Who was There?" Some of X's attested names and answers would dumbfound you. X stayed with them for four days that first time. Then, like morning dew, he was gone.

But X had been correct in one of his sayings. There did appear the deformed counterparts of every one of the bright arts. Almost at once, they came flying on bat wings out of the old pit that had been closed all during the prisoning of the Devil. Duffey, in his New Orleans time stasis, felt some things as immediate happenings that were, to others, spread out over a decade or more. And yet, even to an objective observer, many of the appearances came overnight, or out of the night. It was no good saying that there had always been such deforming counterparts, such a trashing of the arts. Yes, there had been, but there hadn't been such a massiveness about it before. This wasn't bad art done by accident. It was putrid art done on purpose.

Besides the major arts of painting and sculpture and drama and literature-and-letters and classic jazz and long hair music and architecture, there was the massive trashing of every one of the lively arts of daily and nightly life. The style went out of them, the class was gone. Consider only such popular arts as: string bands, horn bands, flute bands, bicycle riding, soap-box spieling, country and ballad music, rag, Dixieland, barbershop quartette singing, opera, operetta, burlesque, little theatre, road show theatre, repertoire theatre, musical comedy, night club comedy, dirt track racing, horse racing, harness racing, radio listening, radio building, frogging, fly fishing, live bait fishing, shrimping, crabbing, oystering, deep sea fishing, wine making, possum hunting, beer making, automobile making and styling, baseball, boxing, sail boating, coffee making, journalistic reporting, two-reel comedy making, foreign travel, bird-dogging, bread baking, tramp steaming, civil litigation, romantic courtship, restaurant dining, home

dining, train travel, carnivals, circuses, county fairs, pub-crawling, bridge building, poker playing, highway construction, rodeo riding, football, six-man football, softball, pecan raising, cattle breeding, deer hunting, coon hunting, concert singing, park strolling, hay riding, kite flying, hoe-down dancing, cotillion dancing, quarter-horse breeding, handicrafting, hell-fire retreats, political cartooning, domino playing, comic strip drawing, widow wooing, organ grinding, horseback riding, airplane piloting, auctioneering, parish bazaaring, editorial writing, sharivaries, play-going, small talk, big talk, honey tree raiding, wolf hunting, picnicking, telescope making and lens grinding, political debating, flower growing, rabbit raising, sauerkraut making, sports page writing, lecturing, newspaper columning, monocycle riding, soda fountaining, juggling, sermon preaching, tent shows, verse writing, verse reciting, park rides, raft racing, wild onion hunting, neighborhood barbecue dinners, sauntering, science fiction, masquerade partying, the everyday art of wearing clothes (and allied, minor arts, such as wearing spats), letter writing, visiting, dead waking, rink skating, rifle shooting, duck hunting, street dancing, electioneering, corn-dog making, flap-jacking. Anyone can list a hundred such minor arts. But some of them were endangered even then.

Many of these minor arts actually disappeared, or ceased to be arts, in those days. And all of them were trashed. They lost class, they lost style. And how had this come about?

“An enemy has done this.”

“Forget the Siege Mentality” was the title of a leading article by a ‘Leading Theologian’ in a diocese paper, an article that was widely reprinted in other diocese papers. On seeing the name on the article, it was the second time that Duffey had come onto the name of this ‘Leading Theologian’. It seemed a curious title, and a curious attitude to take, right at the beginning of the siege itself. It had all the planned

dishonesty of an 'all clear' call when sudden danger had just made appearance.

Duffey reviewed all the theology writing for *The Bark*, and at the drop of an indult he could have named the hundred leading theologians, but this one wouldn't belong to the hundred. The first time that he had encountered that name was on a list of the one thousand persons who had been present for the release of the Devil near Yalta on the Crimea. Yes, Duffey had seen the list and the index, during the third visitation of X, and he had most of it by heart. He was even able to enter into the minds of many of those on the list, and to prowl in those minds with his old power.

"Ah, what bat wings are coming out of that cavery!" Duffey moaned. "The Company of One Thousand came there only out of sordidness and mean-mindedness, and a greed for success, and with a passion for the sight of their own father. And they came away from it with — ah, it's as if they had been created a-old by the Devil there. Did he use instant talismans for his creations? I can feel a cheap-jack trickery, a cheap-shot artistry running through it all. They have trashed the things, they have trashed the world, they have trashed the people.

"Oh how they have trashed dirt track racing and boxing, and pub crawling and soda fountaining, and train travel and comic strip drawing and juggling and duck hunting! How they have trashed Dixieland and burlesque and kite flying. How they have trashed wild onion hunting and night club comedy. Of the minor arts, they have left hardly a joy upon a joy!"

Book Seven

‘And even Levi, the receiver of the tithes, was also, so to speak, through Abraham made subject to tithes, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchisedech met him.’

[*Hebrews 7:9-10*]

In New Orleans, the season and feel of later summer prevailed for the greater part of the year. Melchisedech Duffey was in a late summer state of mind around the calendar and year after year. Things seemed to be going well. There were all sorts of prospects for large and heavy harvests. The nightmare that they might prove to be poisonous harvests was kept in a secure stockade where all nightmares are supposed to be kept, And, really, there was a sharp and exciting taste to poisonous fruit and grain when it comes in less than critical quantities.

For Melchisedech Duffey, in those noontime years of his life, there were delights by the acre. He was in the enduring middle of his golden age. He was bound before God to be joyous (all members of the *Argo* were so bound: that was in the ship's articles). His was a life sanguine, a life besieged, a life militant, and there were drops and gollups of joy all along the blade of it. It was a stasis-present and a kinesis-present, double-time, anomalous years at their best. There were assassins around every corner, but they killed not yet. It was all one delectable noontime of a highlighted late summer.

A large part (about a hundred and thirty-seven percent of it by measure) of Duffey's delectable noontime was made out of spacious and carnal adventures with Letitia. If there had ever been any misunderstanding between these two,

there was none now. Melchisedech and Letitia fit together like the continents of Old Pangaea, which they both now remembered more and more clearly. There was no cloud at all in their sky, but how they did generate lightning out of that blue! It was a world beleaguered by the most insane leaguerers ever, but those things couldn't get you as long as the perpetual light shined upon you.

"It is wonderful to be alive in such a bright noontime as this!" Duffey cried out one couple-of-hours-after-midnight between choruses on his recorder flute. "By the great Sun-Drake, it would be wonderful even to be dead in such a bright noontime!"

"Be you alive or be you dead/Come find a rime for me with bed," said the Letitia. "Nah, man, nah, I'm not insatiable. Just greedy." It was more than just coincidence that these two happiest people should have lived in that continuing happiest time ever.

Oh well, suppose that the world was crumbling between their feet, and the great arts of sidewalk and pavement repair had been trashed. There was underground sunshine in New Orleans even at midnight, and it burst up through every hole that was made in the paved world, burst up like exploding flowers. These were hot, red and yellow and purple flowers named Philos and Eros and Agape. Hot purple Agape, that was the real theme flower for that one-hundred-and-twenty month long, late summertime.

That chubby girl Letitia had long since been transfigured into a person of proto-legendary beauty.

"You are even more beautiful than your daughters." And how is that possible a person had admired her. "Yes, and younger too."

That person had thought that Letitia was the mother of Dotty and Mary Virginia and Margaret Stone. How could anybody be more beautiful than they? Come around and Letitia will show you how.

Letitia kissed lots of people, folks who came into the Walk-In Art Bijou and the bookstore and the pawn shop, people who came into the press room or the institute or the soup kitchen. She greeted all persons with open arms. She kissed Zabotski on his big nose and Stein on his pearly ears. But the thousand other people she kissed on their mouths and made their day for them. People lit up like candles when they heard her voice.

"Can we come in?" people often asked at their door.

"Of course you can come in," Letitia would say.

"Is this some kind of show?" they'd ask. "We didn't see any signs, but we had a feeling of anticipation when we went by here, like there was some kind of show or entertainment going on."

"Come in and see," Letitia would say. "We will try to have an entertainment show, an enjoyment."

Beyond themselves, and the Lord who made them, and the world He had given to them for their house, everything else was bonus for Melchisedech and Letitia. The hot and happy person named Margaret Stone was one such bonus, as she was to everyone who was touched by her life. This Margaret was all ethnics in one, and she was a dago type even beyond the urchinness of Teresa Piccone of the Stranahans (they were the closest of friends, and one of these years they might even meet). You could call Margaret a Street Arab, and she was that too. Ishmael himself was her Lebanese uncle. And she was blood cousin of Absalom Stein ("Oh that damned Jew! Can't he do anything right?" she would sometimes rail at his doings), and she was a niece of that dealer in distressed merchandise in Chicago, Askandanakandrian, the ancient and comic Armenian. She was also a Galilean and a close kinswoman of Jesus Christ. She was a midnight street preacher. She was the one person in the world who made the big difference during the difficult years.

And there was Dotty Yekouris, a beautiful bonus forever. Where Dotty was, there did the eagles gather. Dotty had suitors, and they were swift, high-flying, and fast-swooping suitors. Dotty would love no one but Finnegan in her life, but he was almost always gone, and she very much liked all the fine fellows. She had her pick, and they were the best. They made the bright place even brighter.

Well, some of the suitors, the best and the brightest of them, were connected with those papers, other than *The Bark*, that Dotty and Duffey brought out on the Pelican Press. The *Seaman's Paper* came out on Monday, the *Union Sheet* on Tuesday, and the *Sporting News* on Wednesday, and the *Jazz Magazine* on Friday. There were usually two others, but they varied during the years. A print shop has to do a lot of printing to come out, particularly if it has to go in the hole for a paper like *The Bark*.

There was Gabrielovitch who worked for all the sheets and even for *The Bark*. And he also worked for the Slavic language press, a thing that was going to get him killed. There was a succession of suitors connected with the *Jazz Magazine*, and Dotty named them successively Benny B. Flat. So if you find Benny B. Flat described as one sort of person one time and as another sort of person at another time, it is because they are not the same people. All of them were nice and swinging young men, though all of them were a trifle deaf. Jazz people really don't know that they play as loud as they do.

There was Bello Belonki of the *Sporting News*. He was the Prince of the Cauliflowers. There were half a dozen of the fellows who were involved in the *Union Sheet*, whole committees of them. Nobody had ever seen one of them alone. Take them out of committee and they will die the death.

And there were the seamen. They brought news of the world, almost the only accurate news of the world; and many incredible bits that they brought turned out to be true. Terry

Cork, one of the forty scribbling seamen, did a column '*The Plimsoll Line*' for *The Bark*. And he did about half of the *Seaman's Paper* when he was around town for a few months. Then another Terry (Terry Anderson, Terry Jamil, Terry Renier, Terry Bannon) would take over the task. All of the 'Forty Scribbling Seamen' (that was the name of a song that Dotty had composed) were named Terry.

All of these persons loved Dotty, and many of them wanted to marry her. Dotty herself was a journalist of immense talent. Stein was a professional in the field, but he bowed to her superiority. Duffey was a reckless amateur in the field, and he admitted that she was the best journalist he had ever made. *The Bark* under Dotty's editorship could whip those rival sheets put out by the Devil and his cohorts because it was livelier, was more intelligent, was better printed, had better writers, had finer and more far-ranging features, offered more intricate and more interesting battle, and was right where the rivals were wrong.

And Dotty herself was ("Dotty, go to your advertising writers and borrow adjectives from them." "No, no, they need all of theirs. We will have to borrow them some place else.") (Ah, here's some adjectives for the thing) — Dotty was —

Graceful, ever-blooming, magic, dazzling, attractive, miracle-new, floriferous, gorgeous, velvety, popular, fragrant, glossy, handsome, exquisite, luscious, thrilling, superb, exotic, bell-like, sweet, tropical, juicy, showy, unsurpassed, delicious, enchanting, flashy, stunning, succulent, hardy and disease-resistant.

Certainly those adjectives are out of a Nursery Plant catalog. Where do you get better adjectives? But even they will not adequately describe Dotty. Nor are the poets able to do it, though Finnegans rided her once as—

"More beautiful than birds that fly,
More deeper than a doe-ses eyes."

And the scribbling seaman Terry Cork did her with:

“Was this the face that launched a dozen tugs,
Nine tramps, a brig, a coracle, *The Bark*?
Was this the form that drove all Frenchtown bugs
And blew the lights and left the Quarter dark?”

And Dotty, like Finnegan, was a native of New Orleans so she didn't have to learn the New Orleans trade or talk. In the words of Absalom Stein she was “The most gracious French lady in New Orleans, and she turns out to be a Lithuanian.”

Mary Virginia Schaeffer was a bonus beyond price. Many of the fellows who said they wanted to marry Dotty really wanted to marry Mary Virginia. Even in the ‘sweet blackberry ads’ of the Nursery Plant catalogs there were not the right adjectives to describe her. Dotty called her the Saccharine Kid, partly in affection and partly in jealousy. Mary V. had been the affianced lady of Henri Salvatore and the Emperor Henry always had the best of everything in the world. He had given her up only for God, and he said that he wasn't sure that God was good enough for her. Well, she was an ornament and a joy. She was a very valuable working ornament.

Salvation Sally was a bonus too. Just barely though, as it seemed sometimes. Even her guitar had a Australian accent. There were a lot of poor sinners who saw the light just to stop her from playing that damned thing. “Sure I'll be saved, yes, right now. Just stop that twanging racket.” Well, what does it matter what brings them to the light?

Actually, the Seven Pillars of Righteousness, the true bonifacients, were Henri Salvatore, Melchisedech Duffey, Absalom Stein, Dotty Yekouris, Hans Schultz, Draja Gabrielovitch, and John Solli (Finnegan). These were the trustees of *The Bark* and the members of the board of directors. There would be some replacements as these died

or were killed, but they were the founding originals. But Hans had gone into the construction business in St. Louis. Finnegan was almost always on the other side of the world somewhere. Henry the Merry Monk was in the seminary for some years, and then he was assigned to a church so deep in the swamps that he numbered the musk rats among his parishioners.

Well Dotty and Duffey and Stein, and Mary Virginia Schaeffer (who was not a designated pillar of Righteousness) ran *The Bark*. And *The Bark* was quite cardinal to the power struggle going on in the world.

But the members and associates in willing exile sometimes came on pilgrimage. Some of these were from Chicago and St. Louis, but others from all parts of the world. Most of the visitors, of course, had been to New Orleans before. But showing the City to close friends is a pleasant ritual that must not be abridged because of any previous acquaintance with it. And it wasn't a thing to be hurried through in just a few days. It should take weeks and weeks. In one case, it took more than twenty years.

"These ten blocks square of the old town," said Lily Koch who had come down with Sebastian Hilton and the Countess Margaret, "I believe that I could sell it all in one lot. Other art dealers have handled larger and more mixed lots. It would all be trash if split up, but together the hundred square blocks have an arty sort of coherence. It is poor-boy *Esplanade* Spanish mixed with poor-boy *Place de Grace* French. It's not really antique, but it would make a good period set. I will finger a buyer and see what can be done with it."

"Oh, I guess that I could buy it," the Countess Margaret said. "It would be more to throw you a commission than anything. It would have to be moved to Transylvania, but I don't see any real difficulty there. There are about thirty shabby properties to each square block, and they shouldn't be worth more than about thirty thousand dollars each. Say

a million dollars a square, and a hundred squares of it. Yes, see if you can get it for me, Lily."

"You couldn't get it for twice that," Duffey said.

"And some of us simply wouldn't want to move out of the Quarter," Dotty stated.

"Move out of it? Who said anything about moving out of it?" Lily asked. "If the moving is done well, you'd hardly have any sense of motion. Oh, naturally I intended to buy it complete with people. It wouldn't be any good to us otherwise. It wouldn't even be a work of art without the people."

It was nice to have them all here. Sebastian and the Countess and Lily all knew about the talismanic children, Duffey's Animated Marvels, and they found them and others really marvelous. After all, the Countess was an Animation of someone. It was never quite clear of whom she was an animation, but there were quite a few sorcerers in that field.

There was a lot of fun had and a lot of old songs sung while those three visitors were in town. They sang 'The Gadarene Swine Song'. And Finnegan, who was in town that week, knew that the song had been inspired by his father.

"This is the last time, Melchisedech," Sebastian said as it came up to departure time, "that we meet in the unsanctified flesh. Next time, in the Kingdom!"

"Oh him and his not-long-for-this-world-look," The Countess jibed. "He has had that look and that talk for forty years that I know of. I'll not let him die till he marries me first. He owes me that much."

"Oh, you two had better hurry then," Letitia said. "You have so very little time left. I'm not sure that we will get up to Chicago for it, having had you here now. Will it be next month?"

"Yes, it will be next month," Sebastian said. The Countess opened her mouth to say something, and then closed it again.

One month after they went back to Chicago, Sebastian and the Countess Margaret married.

And one month after that, Sebastian died. Really, he was killed. Charlotte Garfield came to town. She came to attend "*The Royal Rogues' And Graceful Swindlers' Ninth Annual Convention and Confidence-Men's Congress*", which was held at the Royal Orleans Hotel and had about five hundred confidence people and thieves in attendance. It was supposed to be a fun thing, but there were seminars by experts for experts in recondite fields. Charlotte visited the Duffey Nation in cowgirls' boots and seven-and-a-half gallon hat, and not much between. And she still looked like a nine year old girl.

Now wait a minute. Charlotte had said that she was thirty-eight years old when she had met Duffey on the train in 1925. So she was about thirteen years older than the century, and the century was now a little more than half gone. This was getting out of hand.

"You had better repent, little girl," Salvation Sally worried over her. "There is something the matter with you. I think you have been consorting with the Devil. And it isn't nice for little girls to smoke cigars. I will just—"

"Watch it, Sister Sal," Charlotte cautioned in a very snappish voice. "The last lady who tried to take a cigar from this little girl is now called 'Lefty'."

"Oh, Charlotte, you little monkey-faced monster!" Margaret Stone railed at her. "Your jokes are old and tired, and so are you. You've got your toes curled over the brink itself, and you're too dumb to know it. There is something somewhere that shows just how old you really are."

"Oh, my 'Mendacious Midget Doll', is that what you mean, Maggie? How did you know I had it? It works better than that picture of Dorian Gray of which Duffey has the original in his Walk-In Art Bijou and doesn't know what it is. Maggie, that doll looks two hundred years old now. And that's really about what I am. Oh, I lied to Duffey that first time I met him about

how old I was. I was a lot older than that. I haven't actually consorted with the Devil though. I've turned him down again and again. He made an appearance at our Convention in Baltimore two years ago. He isn't really an expert on the details of the trade; he'll put money into almost any spiel just like the veriest Rube would. I never saw a fellow who could be taken so easy. But he does have a lot of 'overthought' as he calls it. He believes in fraud for the sake of fraud, and for the character formation that it brings about. And he suggests that we give up this pretense about going easy on widows and orphans and those who can't afford to be fleeced. He says that what we really have in us is the lust to pillage those who are clear down and out of their last coin and credit. It is easier to grind the faces in the mud, he says, if they are already brought pretty low. And he's right. It makes me uneasy to have somebody like that in the 'Royal Rogues and Graceful Swindlers'. He isn't graceful, but he is royal. Ah, Maggy, yes, I do know that my toes are curled over. Do you think I'll beat the rap in the end?"

"No. No chance at all of that," said Margaret Stone who disliked being called Maggie by that damned runt. "It's like playing 'Nine Dollar Dog'. You really win the game or lose it nine plays before the end. There isn't any way you can change it after you're into the last nine plays."

"That's not fair. There should be a two-minute warning called before the end."

"There isn't, Midge. But *you* chose the game, Baby Face."

"But I won't know when I'm into the nine last plays."

"No. You sure won't. But you chose the game."

Bagby and Mary Louise came down from St. Louis. At the moment they walked in, about eight o'clock in the morning, Duffey had just got his weekly letter from Bagby. "Wait a while, folks," he said. "This is more important. It's the high point of my week." Duffey got these letters early every Monday morning, before the postman came "whereat there

is some small mystery” Duffey said out loud this day. But he disregarded his two cherished visitors and set about opening and reading the letter of one of them.

“Melky, aren't you going to greet us?” Mary Louise sulked in a strong voice. “My brother and my passion, *we are here ourselves.*”

“I'm not sure that you are,” Duffey mumbled as he began to read. “This is equally yourselves that I hold in my hand, and it's in a more efficient form. Why should I see you when I can read about you from you? I always preferred books to the movies made out of them. And I've come to distrust Animations, even my own. Make yourself at home, good people, and I will be with that version of you as soon as I finish with this one.”

Letitia was there then, and she embraced the Bagbys with her hot sincerity. And the whole bunch of dazzlers was soon there, Transcendent Dotty and Sugar Cane Schaeffer and Glorious Stein and Midnight Margaret and Salvation Sally with her aggressive bony face and her pewter heart.

But Duffey (“He always looks like a bear who's just learning to read whenever he has something to pore over,” Letitia said of him) was still busy with the Bagby letter when they were all starting out for Breakfast at Brennan's.

“One should always leave good reading for good company,” Salvation Sally quoted. “The Lord of Chesterfield said that.” Bagby kissed Sally in delight. He already knew her a little. Marie Monaghan had known Sally in Australia and had sent her fare to come to America. Then she had shipped her to New Orleans as a unique contribution to the enterprise.

“Come along, Duff, *right now,*” Letitia insisted. “Stop running into things. We're going to breakfast.”

“Yes, yes, Oh Bloody Heart, we will do that thing right now,” Duffey said. But he banged only one hand together, and he continued with the letter in his other hand while they walked to Brennan's. (It was only two blocks. In the Quarter,

if you belong to the Blessed, everything is always only two blocks.)

"Duffey simply cannot begin a week without reading your letter, Bascom," Letitia said. "You are the most faithful correspondent in the world."

"Bagby is?" Mary Louise asked bewildered. "He never writes a letter. This whole thing is as fishy as the Gascinade River."

"These are letters of another context, Mary Louise," Bagby said, "and they are outside of the daily time. Should I not have a time stasis as well as Duffey? No, of course I never write letters, Mary Louise. This is a separate thing."

So they passed it off for then, but could it be passed off forever? Really there was something of an exterior state about those letters from Bagby. It was as if they were written by Bagby's unconscious to Duffey's unconscious. And they didn't come by any regular delivery. They simply appeared on Duffey's table every Monday morning.

("What does he say this time?" Margaret Stone later reported that Bagby had asked Duffey in a very low voice. Nobody else heard this, but Margaret Stone had the sharpest ears of anyone around there, regular lynx-ears. Possibly she misunderstood the words. If she did, it was the first time that she ever misunderstood anything. But she had to have misunderstood, or this would open up a whole new area of mystification.)

The stamps on the letters were curious also. They looked very much like United States Stamps unless one looked at them from a very close range, five inches or less. But then one had to remember that Bagby was engraver and spoofer for two of his trades, for those were 'otherwhere' stamps, the rarest aberrations that collectors ever come upon. But they were good enough to fool the U.S. Post Office Department, for all of them were post-marked correctly. No, they weren't either. For this, one must look at them even closer, from a distance of three inches or less. It wouldn't be fair to say

that they were post-marked wrongly, but they were marked with 'otherwhere' post-marks that were very like a valid St. Louis post-mark.

Maybe Duffey should have taken them to a stamp and post-mark expert. But he did. Duffey *was* a stamp and post-mark expert. He was a dealer in such things. Maybe he should have asked Bagby what it was all about. Well, he did, in a way. And Bagby answered in a way. Duffey may have been satisfied. Others of the curious people would always remain curious.

There was one blessed thing about New Orleans on the River. It was not a slave to the small hours of the night. A party could go directly from Breakfast at Brennan's to a barrel house or a night club and find something going on. Why should the hours after the sun has come up be slighted?

"But there will not be anything here like the Rounders' Club in St. Louis," Mary Louise bragged, just as if the New Orleans-proud Duffey hadn't invented the Rounders' Club in St. Louis.

"Not quite like," Duffey said, "but on the same high order. Let's go to '*Good Guy's*'."

They went to '*Good Guy's*', and a band was playing Monumental Jazz. It was playing it loudly and solidly and with a good foundation.

"How would Lord Chesterfield decide between good jazz and good conversation, Sally?" Bagby asked Salvation Sally. "How would Solomon decide?"

"I don't know," she said. "I don't think they had very good jazz then."

"Well, have they now?" Bagby asked. "Have they, Duffey? Has this thing become less than holy even in the city of its birth?"

"I suppose it's still holy," Melchisedech said, "and it hasn't been trashed as much as most of the arts. But Monumental Jazz has lost its green youth and is already

playing at its own long, long funeral. Jazz at wakes and funerals is more common in New Orleans than in other places. And it's no odd thing for a jazz man, especially a horn man, to sit up in his coffin and add his own note to his obsequies. This is what several styles of classical jazz are doing now, giving their last licks to their own funerals.

"The classical jazz has grown old raucously. I don't believe that it was ever intended to become one of the ancient arts. A hundred years for it, maybe, and half of that is already gone. It is too little creative now, and too much reminiscent, and it builds monuments to itself. But, man, man, listen to those three horns build monuments!

"It hasn't been trashed as much as many other things, but it is hard to talk with it going on."

When there was a lull in the morning and mourning, Bascom Bagby went up and took one of the horns and began to blow down the gusty corridors of the '*Gadarene Swine Song*'. And then the Monumental Jazz men took it up. It was really a sea-shanty tune, but the monumental jazz men worked it in.

2

A little bit later, the Duffey and the Bagby Nations went out of '*Good Guy's*' and around and into an art shop on Royal Street. And Bagby, like Duffey, always strode into a new art shop as if he meant to conquer it forthwith.

"What piece is that?" Bagby asked as he stood before a four-chambered red heart. The heart was made of porcelain or ceramic, and each of its four chambers was as big as a dog house. The four chambers were shelved and filled with pictures and small statues and artifacts.

"It is by Elroy Redheart, of course," Duffey said, "and it is an autobiographical work. It changes, but not very much."

"Why don't you have it in your own shop?" Bagby asked.

"I've had it in my own shop several times," Duffey says, "but now Hennessy has it in his."

The first of the dog-house-sized red rooms was filled up with blue sky and red clay and green pasture scenes. It was rural Louisiana or Mississippi or Alabama. There were peanut and cotton patches, and rice fields. There were tractors and come-along plows. There were hundreds of figurines of children and younglings and men and women, working people and negros and travelers, dudes and high-binders. There was a school house with a sign on it 'School's Out'. There were dancers, with fiddlers to the left of them and a blare-box to the right of them. There was young fun stuff all over the place.

There was a young girl dead on a sofa in a room with a wall cut away to show the scene. Beside her on a little table was an opened box of candy, and several favors and souvenirs and a party hat scattered about. In the midst of it, and a dozen times as large as the other candy pieces, was her own red chocolate heart. It had been taken out of her opened breast. And her 'card' was daggered to a wall there beside her. It was the Jill of Hearts.

"I will have to own that collection or combination," Bagby said.

"I have some pieces for it in my own shop," Duffey said. "They are the better pieces, really, but they stand out too much and detract from the balance. Elroy Redheart sells some of the miniature statuettes and paintings out of it when he gets hungry. Then he makes others."

"We haven't any room for it at home, Bag, and we really haven't any money for it," Mary Louise objected mildly.

"Then I will sell you for money, Mary Louise," Bagby said. "And with you sold and gone, there will be room for it in the

house and there will be money to pay for it also. I must have this red-heart cosmos.”

“I’m a red-heart cosmos myself,” Mary Louise told him, “with rooms that you’ve hardly ever been in. Time is getting short for it, Bag. You had better make up for your neglect.” Then Mary Louise was examining and later buying a French-Lady Purse-Pistol, very small, very old. It used wad powder and round shot.

The second of the four red rooms was, in one half of it, of richer interiors and of richer carryings-on. There were brash and opulent people in its crassly figured scenes, some of whom had been in the earlier bucolicity and some of whom hadn’t. There was a free-swinging success in the stylized sets here. There were chrome babes and chrome cars and chrome domiciles. This was all a high-toned summertime shuffle with words and music, brag words and brag music.

In the other half of this second of the red rooms, there was artificial lightning and thunder, very well done, though the thunder was produced by the crackling of a bright sort of parchment paper, and the lightning by the fracturing glitter of it whenever one leaned close to look and breathed on it. This was a totally outdoor scene with some men of the same brash and opulent types as before. Now they were running a shoot-um under green skies and bluish jungle fronds, with great activity coming out of mint-green seas and sidling up on to coral beaches. There were combat buffalos and combat alligators in the show, and other such amphibious armed vehicles coming out of the mouths of landing crafts. The scenes were of war-invasion and its bangy action.

Then, in an offset scene, there was a bone-thin, after-the-fact man sitting on a stump with his head lolling on his folded arms on another stump. And set out there, on a second and larger stump, were one hand, one foot, one eye, and a flutter-valve out of a heart, almost enough stuff to start to make a new man. All of these things on the stump had somehow come out of the after-the-fact man who was

slumped there. A card daggered to the stump identified him. He was the Jack of Hearts.

"Hennessy, a thousand dollars is too much money for this," Bagby said. "I am a poor man from up the river, and you are a rich city blood dealer taking advantage of my love for peculiar art."

"Bagby, man, this certainly is *not* too much money for it," Hennessy protested honestly. "Why do you think that your half-brother Duffey is no longer showing it in his shop? It is because the maker of this, Elroy Redheart, has put a the price of one thousand dollars on it. He says he is selling himself in this, but he wants somebody else to have this essence of him. He says he will not profiteer in his own flesh and soul, and that is why he has put this ridiculously low figure on it. But you haven't seen it all. Nobody could see it all in an hour or a day. We have here more than two thousand separate exquisite miniatures in round and in low round and in painted flat."

"You could make one like it yourself, Bagby," Mary Louise said. "You know how to work in porcelain and bronze and walnut wood and tin and oil paint. And you really make things better than this Elroy Redheart does."

"I could make it better, yes, but I would have to pull my own heart out of me," Bagby said, "and I'm not through with it yet. But here's a big red heart already pulled out of a body and put up for sale with more than two thousand miniatures. I will buy it."

The third of the four red rooms was filled with scenes of more hurried and more feverish opulence. There was the bone-thin man again, and he had a black patch over one eye now, but he had become a hectic dude. There was a breathtakingly beautiful young woman romping through episodes and adventures. The cars in the scenes were more chromed, and lower and longer than the pre-war cars had been. There was hurry, high-priced hurry about everything. There were so many things to be done that in one scene the

man was using three hands to do them all. There was one little room that was wallpapered with green money, and there were piles of the green stuff everywhere.

The artist Elroy Redheart had made deft use of new, hot, artificial colors to indicate new, hot, artificial sins. There was an artistic cheapening here, not that the artist was trying to skimp things, but that he was trying to show that cheap quality. Most of the figurines here were plastic-cast little pieces that were made in Hong Kong. They were not made by the artist at all. They were like the little things that are put in cracker-jack boxes for prizes, and they were a dime a dozen on the trifle market. But they were set in with prismatic reflecting things that gave a fractured light to all of the scenes of this group.

Small and glinty hints told that here were drinks of a more sophisticated sort and that they would give more sophisticated bang-heads.

Overpowering sound was there. It was portrayed by deforming the scenes to make it seem as though they were filtered through a vision cracked by 'hard rock'. And the ghostly powders were somehow indicated, the dip and the deep-sleep, the glow and the snow. A real touch of the odor of them was set there. The beautiful and romping young woman, wherever she had been dancing, now had her feet bloody up to the ankles. But she was not lying dead, not she. She had her own heart out in her hands, and she was sticking pins into it and giggling. Certainly an artist can indicate a giggling figure. There's nothing to it.

The beautiful woman took a pin larger than the others, a pin with a Moloch face on the head of it, and stabbed her own 'Queen of Hearts' card to her own heart in her hands.

The fourth red room was vacant. There was a noose dangling from the ceiling, and there was a stool standing under the noose on which a person might stand to hang himself. There was a sign there:

"This room for rent. Will decorate to suit tenant. The noose is an optional feature."

"Oh yes, one thousand dollars, Mr. Bagby," Hennessy said as he counted it out. Baggy always carried his money in ten dollar bills though the rest of the world had gone to twenties. "Shall I send it over to Duffey's shop?" Hennessy asked. "Then you could enjoy it for the remainder of your stay in town, and Duffey could ship it for you to St. Louis."

"No. Duffey would steal some of the pieces," Bagby said. "You ship it to St. Louis from here, Hennessy."

"You paid too much for it, Bagby Wrongheart," Dotty Yekouris said. "It's only a novel, you know."

"I paid some of that just for the beauty of Hennessy's spiel about the artist putting a ceiling on the price. I will have to add that one to my own repertoire. A novel, Dot?"

"Sure. It's one of the Open Heart Novels that are big in paperbacks now. There's a hundred novels with names and plots almost like that, 'Queen Card High', 'Game of Hearts', 'High Hand Loses', 'Death of Hearts', 'Great Red Heart'. You can get them at any paperback stand for forty cents and read it in forty minutes. A thousand dollars is too much."

"He is like a kid in a China Shop," Mary Louise said. "He'll buy anything."

"Have you noticed," Bagby said to Duffey one day, "how our old stalkers, the SFM, have been appearing more and more in the stories and continuities in the rag-pulp magazines?"

"Why would a man of my class and style be reading anything less smooth than himself?" Duffey asked. "And I don't even know what the SFM is."

"The Slant-Faced Men who travel in threes," Bagby said. "You killed one of them, and I killed one of them, but there must be spares. There are still three of them, or many threes of them. They are given a humor treatment in the letter

departments of the pulps, comic monsters like BEMs and HLPs.”

“They have turned up in three of the comic strips.” Dotty Yekouris said, “In ‘*Flame Man*’, in the ‘*White Avenger*’, and in ‘*Captain Justice*’. I’d find them comic myself if I didn’t know that they were real.”

“Comic strips?” Bagby asked. “Why would a man of my class and style be reading anything less comic than myself?”

“They are the ones who bug me the most,” Margaret Stone said, “because I know that they really do kill so many people. I can get along with all the others. The assassins of the Jebel Shammar sect flash knives at me and tell me that they will murder me if I don’t cease preaching the doctrine of the Real Presence at night. They say that their Djinn is the only Real Presence at night and that he is a jealous Djinn. But I just give them a little Arabian sweet talk and tell them that New Orleans is a truce city like Khamis Mushait. Besides, I’m not sure that there is any Jebel Shammar sect. Those three are all the Arabs there are around here, and they go to Tulane University. They may be wrap-head kidders. And the Red Fisters from Sardinia say that they will wear my guts for scarves. But when I have dawn coffee at Messina’s or Anthony Ghost’s, they are always there. I tell them a shaggy duck joke every morning, and they say they let me live through the night just to hear the next one even if I am a Whore of Rome. But I’m afraid of the Slant-Faced Men. I tell them that they’re zombies with winders between their shoulder blades and that they’re getting run down. They do have little humps on their backs under their coats, and they may be winders. But the Three Slant Faces won’t talk and they won’t joke. They scare me more than any of the people who intend to kill me.”

“Yes, I think the Slant Faces do have winders,” Duffey said. “But is it a ‘self-destruct’ or a ‘disappearing record’ that they are wound up to act? I saw the death of Sebastian Hilton in a transport or a detached experience. The Three

Slant-Faced Men killed him, and they cut the Devil's tetragrammaton design on his chest. But the official report was that Sebastian died of an infectious fever. I flew up there and I demanded to see everything at once, and I did see everything. He *had* died of an infectious fever (actually, it was the old plague itself), and the plague sores on his chest *did* form the design of the Devil's tetragrammaton just as I had seen them. But they were fever sores. They were not knife cuts. Whatever winders the Slant-Faced Men have stuck between their shoulder blades, they wind up some pretty tricky records for them to play."

"I'll be killed by them myself," Bagby said, "and yet my death will be attributed to my liver, a gentle organ that never harmed anybody."

"How is your liver really, Bag?" Duffey asked him.

"Oh tell us how's your liver, Mr. B.," Dotty sang.

"I believe that, with a little help from some of my creations, we could make a song out of that," Duffy proposed. Mary Virginia Schaeffer went to the piano (this was in '*Trashman's Girl-a-Rama*', and several of them hammered out the song then. More songs have been born in *Trashman's* than in any place in the block. Duffey accompanied them on a house banjo (he hadn't his own banjo with him) and all of the unofficial members of the Pelican Glee Club sang thus:

"Is it true you have abused it?
Have you battered it and boozed it?
Are you sorry you misused it
Horribly?
Does it need the Great Forgiver?
Is it feeling sensitiver?
Is it shrunken to a sliver?
Oh tell us how's your liver,
Mr. B."

Why, they were untrashing one of the minor arts there!

"I certainly prefer Duffey's flute to his banjo," Letitia said. "He can't sing when he's playing the flute, and the rest of us all sing so well!"

But Duffey sang with the rest of them as they went on with it:

"Is it silted like a river?
Does it rattle like a flivver?
Does it quake a lot and quiver
Tenderly?"

Bascom Bagby added in verses to the Pelican Song to himself, and all the silver-tongued people sang the grand finale:

"Is it mighty coy and clivver?
Comes it down to now or nivver?
Oh tell us how's your liver,
Mr. B."

And Bagby did look rather bad.

"It's the last time you'll see me in this life, of course, Duffey," he said. "I'll just go home and create a few more loose ends, and then I'll die. But I've enjoyed it all."

The Bagbys were around there for a couple of weeks and they had a mildly festive time of it. Bascom discovered heresies in many of the parishes of the city and he reported them to the Archbishop as well as to Duffey. Then they went back to St. Louis.

But that wasn't the last time that Duffey saw Bagby in this life. Bagby lived for at least two more years, and Duffey saw him at least twice more, once in St. Louis, once down in New Orleans again. And the Bagby letters were still received every Monday morning.

Duffey discovered, quite by accident, the names of the Three Slant-Faced Men. These were given one day, almost in throw-away fashion, in the comic strip '*Flame Man*'. The

names were Amraphel, Arioch, and Thadal. The slant-faces were depicted as no more than three stooges in '*Flame Man*', and yet here were their revelatory names. Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings, out of the pens of comic strip writers, comes wisdom.

These were three crooked kings. Amraphel was the King of Shinar or upper Babylonia. Arioch was King of Ellasar or Pontus or Lower Babylonia. Thadal was King of the Nations, or of the Goyim. These were the opposite kings, the anti-magi, who had no magic at all. It is unnatural, or at least it is inhuman, for a person to have no magic at all. To be human is to have at least a handful of magic, and these three didn't.

All three of them were followers (though this was not given in the '*Flame Man*' comic strip) of Chodorlahomor who was King of Elam or Susiana, a Devildom east of the Tigris.

"I always thought that Abraham was biting off some big chunks there, tackling four kings of such realms as those with only three hundred and eighteen men, and they naught but sheep and camel herders," Melchisedech said. "Well, so do I think so now, so did I think so then. I don't believe they liked me blessing the man."

Duffey had begun to create a great number of small statues and groups. He made several large sets or mansions on the order of the chambered heart display of Elroy Redheart that Bagby had bought. He made displays of his primordial lives and kingships, and also of his twentieth century childhoods and lives.

One huge, surrealistic assembly was, according to Absalom Stein, intended to indicate the seven hidden years of the Life of Melchisedech Duffey. It was not divided into seven chambers though. It may have followed some other time.

Duffey became adept at moulding figures out of clay and baking and painting them. He also made figures out of bread dough, wheat flour and corn meal mixed and with pigments

added when he mixed them; then he baked them hard and varnished them. He probably made ten thousand of these figurines to fill in his thematic displays and collections and provinces and mansions. And some of them he just made for personal need.

3

‘Three things are necessary for the preservation of the world: the Law, Worship of God, Deeds of Kindness and Charity.’

That seemed clear enough and easy enough. Get enough people to comply with these things and the world will be preserved. And preserving the world is really the same thing as rebuilding the world. It is the everlasting raising up of pieces of it as often as they fall down.

Duffey himself had a great respect for The Law, and a working respect for laws-lower-case. He ostentatiously worshipped God. But does not ostentation take much of the grace out of worship? Sure it does. It takes some of it out, but not all of it. And some people are made with the ostentatious character in them. Duffey could be kind. He could be charitable. It was just that he had trouble being both of them at the same time. And do not try to tell him that the meaning of the two words are the same. The chances are that Duffey knows more about the meaning of words than you do.

It is the first two things that are really the same under different names: The Law, and the Worship of God. The comprehensive name for the congruence of these two things is ‘The Faith’.

Faith and works it must be then. And faith and works had come under deadly and devious siege. Duffey valiantly defended a sector against this siege. No, that wasn't safer

than other sectors, and it wasn't bloodless. There were skulls to be split here, and enemies to be eviscerated. There were sub-segments to be defended, and some of them had become slippery with blood.

Art as Law. Art as Worship. Art as Kindness. Art as Charity. Art as Creation. A synthesis of all these things must be built. The synthesis was already present in the articulate body to which we belong. But could it not also be made on a clay-human and daily basis? Possibly. It already had been, almost certainly.

Duffey was haunted by the feeling that he had already built this synthesis somewhere. If he had built it, why couldn't he remember it?

Vincent and Teresa came down to New Orleans from St. Louis for a visit about that time. Then Duffey remembered. This Teresa was the synthesis of all these arts, and Duffey had already built her.

She came with Vincent and a couple of their children. The wanderer Finnegan was also in town, and Teresa sent Vincent and Finnegan off to carouse together. She sent the children out to play.

"And stay out," she told the children, "for a week at least. I don't know where the custom ever developed of letting children and dogs come into the house. Oh, at home I let them come in two or three days a year, in very cold weather. But here there's no need for that."

Showboat Teresa put out an issue of *The Bark* by herself, writing every word and line of it, and setting it up too. "Yes, it's botchy looking," she acknowledged, "but it's got soul. None of that correct and professional appearance of a Dotty edition. I meant it to look correct and professional though, but the main thing is excellence of content. Dotty, did you fully appreciate my article on—"

"We fully appreciate you, Teresa," Dotty said. "The issue is truly a Special, and the essence of a Special is that it

should happen only once.” Teresa also put out an edition of ‘*Show-Bill*’ by herself. This was a little show business sheet that they had been doing on the Pelican Press every Friday morning. They had always used to send it to Teresa in St. Louis. In fact, the Star and Garter in St. Louis always carried an ad in ‘*Show-Bill*’ until the S and G was forced out of business. The issue that Show-Boat put out now had a large advertisement for the Decatur Street Opera House.

“There isn't any Decatur Street Opera House, you dumb Guinea,” Dotty told her. “What's the matter with you anyhow? How do we get money for ads from imaginary places?”

“There is a Decatur Street Opera House, now,” Showboat said. “This is just the first appearance of it. Oh Duffey, there's no reason for you to shake like that just because one of your premonitions comes home to roost. Yeah, here's a hundred dollars for the ad, Dotty. They'll pay you a hundred dollars a week to run the same ad.” Showboat gave the hundred dollars to Dotty.

“They are very futuristic people who are behind the opera house,” the Showboat said. “It's one of the places that had to happen. There wasn't any good place in town to present eschatological dramas.”

Teresa Showboat Piccone Stranahan put a hundred pounds of Italian vegetables into the Giant Pot that was simmering forever. Sure Italian vegetables are different from other vegetables. They aren't grown, not anywhere. They are imported by Importers into all the major ports of the world, but no one knows where they originate. Even in Italy they are imported from elsewhere. They are received on open-ended manifests.

“It is a test, it is a test,” Showboat said.

“Yes, people will have to be really hungry to eat out of the Pot for a few days,” Mary Virginia told her.

Teresa cooked all-Italian meals for everybody, three times a day for three days. Ah, they weren't like those you get in O'Conner's Italian Restaurant or even in Peterson's Italian Restaurant. One had to love Teresa to eat them. They were works of art, yes, and they were fine to look at. There should have been a way to make them edible, Margaret Stone said.

Showboat went out street-preaching with Margaret Stone one midnight. "That's the time to get the really unsavory ones, between midnight and six in the morning," Margaret said. Showboat had been addressing herself to every sort of audience since she was three years old, and she wasn't bashful about things like this. She knew all there was to know about showmanship and presentation. She had been making lots of political talks as well as rebuild-the-world talks in St. Louis. She had a voice that would carry to every corner of a theatre and to every recess of a city block. Her spiels, like everything else about her, were works of art.

What went wrong then? Over-confidence probably. Her talks didn't go over, not in the night-time Quarter. Never in her life had she come up against so complete a bad-show as this.

"Aw stuff it, Dago!" the rough guys would holler at her. They booed her and made dirty noises. Showboat could always handle hecklers, but this was massive and contrived heckling. But Margaret Stone always began to talk after Showboat had been shouted down, and she hooked every one of those ruffians. She broke them down. She shook them up. She poured out love and tongue-lashing. She enchanted the damned fools off their feet. She made them sob, some of them, and repent of their sins.

They tried it on another corner. Once more, Showboat busted all over the place. And then Margaret would sweep whole blocks of people clear out of themselves. Margaret Stone didn't know anything about showmanship or presentation. She hadn't the voice to fill a theatre or a block. Sometimes her voice failed her so completely that she cried

in frustration, and the fellows would refer to her as Whispering Maggy. The people often had to crowd in very close to catch all that she was saying. But when they came in close, they were changed forever.

But Showboat saw something out of the corner of her eye, and then something else, and then a third something. She knew about the 'three-spot device' for instigating or corrupting a crowd, the device that the red-brains use so successfully. It's a minimum of three points for manipulating a mob. Three hyenas were working three corners of every gathering crowd, three hyenas with disguised faces and disguised voices. And they had been getting in part of their dirty work even before Showboat and Margaret arrived. One or more of them knew Margaret Stone's routes.

One of the hyenas was Finnegan, Damn him! Another of them was Showboat's own husband, Vincent Stranahan. Damn him twice! And the third one of them was Absalom Stein. Treasons such as this pass for humor with some people. Oh what a vile trio of entrail-eating, presentation-shredding hyenas they were!

Ah well, Showboat fingered them to the crowd then. (This wouldn't have happened to begin with except that Showboat was so short-sighted that she couldn't distinguish people at twenty feet.) The crowd had already been conned and subverted by the hyenas, but it could be turned around. And Teresa turned those hooters around. People quickly pinioned those false three and ripped off their false noses and Mardi Gras masks and held them there secure. Teresa railed at those three sick perverts and had the street folks ready to perform an Old Testament stoning execution of them within five minutes. And Margaret Stone got some of her old faithful friends to force those three jokers to their knees and to pour dust and ashes over their heads. "That the Grace may enter into their unwilling souls and they may be saved by the miracle of interposition!" Margaret croaked out in her cracked-laughter voice. People didn't bad-show

Showboat very long after she caught onto a thing, and they didn't bad-show Margaret at all.

This rebuilding of the world on street corners can be a lot of fun.

Teresa said one day that she wanted everybody assembled. The Showboat was going to explain the fundamentals to all the special people and lay bare the roots of creation and substance. They had wakened imperfectly from a long sleep, she said, and it was time that they remembered their own earlier episodes. She phoned Father Henri Salvatore at his parish in Boondocks Louisiana and told him that she wanted him to come to town.

"Be quiet, woman," Henry told her. "Go home and be subject to your husband. Oh, I forgot, your husband is my old buddy Vincent, isn't he? Well then, take him home and make him be subject to you. No, Showboat, I really can't come. And I *do* know how it is. Was I Euphemus for nothing? But explain it to those with heads and memories less open than mine."

Teresa got her husband Vincent, and Finnegan, Duffey, Stein, Dotty, Mary Virginia, X (who had just got to town on his third or fourth visitation), Letitia, Margaret Stone, Salvation Sally, Gabrielovitch, Zabotski, maybe several other folks, all together.

"Quite a few of us are special people, very old people," this Showboat Teresa said. "We extend very far into the past and also into the future. Give me your ashes there, Duffey. We are too much in the daily world, and we tend to forget just what substance we are made of."

"Not for tricks, Showboat," Duffey said. "My ashes are holy."

"So am I," Teresa said. She took the ashes in their urn, that artful cigar canister that had once belonged to the King of Spain, and opened it. She washed her hands in the ashes,

and they were so fine as to be almost liquid. Then she was washing her hands in flame.

"It isn't everybody's ashes that will flame like this," she said.

"Melchisedech has a lot to him." She washed her face and hair with flame also. There was only the slightest smell of burning hair and of burning flesh. Teresa seemed to be in passion or pain, but not from the ashes-turned-to-fire. She gathered up the flame again.

"There is another one in your hair," Margaret said. "No, on the other side."

Teresa gathered that flame in also. She put all the flames back into the urn, and they crawled back under their ashes.

"We are all flame-persons," Teresa said. "Well, most of us are. Even under the appearance of death and reduction we can still flame. We had been active a long time ago, and then we had rested and slept. Then one of us came and woke the rest of us up again. He woke us up in blundering fashion, for he was still half asleep himself. And he still is.

"Melchisedech, you haven't even understood your own role. You didn't make us. That's only a way of speaking. You can't make people, but maybe you can assemble them. You aren't a creator, Melchisedech the Magus! You are an awakener. No, really, that's all you had to do, just wake us up. And now you've done that. Don't try to do too much else. You're not capable of a very great lot.

"Yes, you woke us up. And you made us to go into other bodies and bellies to be born again. That was no great thing. But why were we waked? It was because we were among the few folks who were around before the Devil was imprisoned. Now he is loosed. So we are loosed also and set to action to be able to combat him. We knew his on-the-loose tactics from of old. Gah, won't they ever change!

"Casey in Chicago, Mary Catherine in Chicago also, Hans and Marie in St. Louis, Henry in Boondocks Louisiana, listen, I want to talk to you! Of course you can hear me! We were

not the first crew nor the first pilots, nor did we go on the first voyage. But we did sail on that first ship The *Argo* which is the actual as well as the phonetic equivalent of the Ark. We put the first sails on it and the first rudder. It had neither before, since it was going nowhere except afloat.

"We'elleh shemoth. And these are our names. Duffey is the real and original Melchisedech, though his Argonaut name was something other. All of our names have many depths and versions to them. Finnegan is Iason himself, but the later Romans called him Jason. Hans is Orpheus, and at a later time he was manifest as Faust. Henry is Euphemus (his ocean-father taught him to walk on water, but he seldom does it now). Vincent is Meleager. Casey is Peleus. Dotty is Medea the vile sorceress (but it is all a mistake about her having a vile name and reputation). Marie is Eurydice. But did not Eurydice die and go to the underworld? No, she pretended to misunderstand, and she pulled a trick. She went to the down-under world of Australia instead, and she is the mother of all Australians and South Island people. Mary Virginia is Laonome. I am Atalanta, and that's only a small part of who I am. Mary Catherine is Antigone. Stein is Ab-Salom, the Father of Peace. He was a ship's chandler and provisioner on the Euxine, and he decided to go along on the *Argo* to look after his investments. I don't know what dynasty you others belong to, but you would hardly be in this company now if you weren't special. I don't know what company Gabrielovitch and Zabotski and Salvation Sally belong to. It may be one even more ancient than ours. I do know what company Margaret Stone belongs to, but I'm not telling. And I sure don't know about X."

"You are talking about people in a Greek myth." Zabotski asked. "Why?"

"No, no, not in Greek myth. In ancient fact before that. We are older than the Greeks. Even Homer referred to us as unaccountably ancient. And our quest was the prototype of all quests. We went to Colchis on the Black Sea on the best

known of our voyages. We went past the Devil's preordained prison on the Chersonese on that same voyage. We found the shining garment, the Golden Fleece, at the end of our famous voyage, and we have it yet. The Devil would give his thousand-year molars to know where we have it hidden. As long as we have it inviolate, the Devil is not completely loose.

"We went over rock beaches and rock wastes that were sown with Dragons' Teeth; we went over them to get the Fleece. We got it without triggering the Dragons' Teeth to spring into armed-warrior life. They were the guards and the threat. We buried them very much deeper under rocks, and now the Devil wants them and he can't wake them up. He blows on that Dog's-Horn Bugle of his, but he can't wake them."

"He is cashing in quite a few dragons' teeth lately," Stein said, "and they are devilishly well-armed warriors."

"Those are from lesser dragons' teeth," Teresa said. "He has not been able to use those in the main caches. The obliteration of the Black Sea in the Thunder-Colt aspect of History (we're within a couple of decades of that, one way or the other), is only an attempt by the Devil to obliterate all traces of his prison on the Black Sea. There was always the chance that he might be locked up there again. But the shore is obliterated along with the sea, and part of it is dragons'-tooth shore. Are they destroyed there, or can he save them? Can he have it both ways?"

"What's the matter. Don't you people remember these things even yet?"

"I remember only snatches of them," Mary Virginia said, "but now you bring other parts of it back to me. I hated my name of Laonone then and I hate it now."

"It seems to me that there were several voyages we took," Dotty said. "There were others besides the one to Colchus."

"There were nine voyages, I think," Teresa Showboat said.

"There were thirteen," said Absalom Stein. "But I forget where the *Argo* is now."

"That's a thing the Devil would give his five-hundred-year molars to know," Melchisedech said. "But I'm assured that the *Argo* is still seaworthy. You'll not demean me with your words, Showboat. It was the *Argo* herself that was called the Show Boat. Oh what a castled masterpiece she was when we got all that superstructure on her! The Show Boat was not the lady love of the third officer. But people, I did make you, though it's hardly worth arguing about. I evoked your clay, yes. That's the same thing as to make you."

"Was it the thirteenth voyage on which you were reduced to ashes, Duffey?" Margaret Stone asked him.

"Nay, it was the fourteenth. Some of the others don't remember it yet. It's technically in the future, but the ashes here are proof that some parts of the future have already happened."

They had quite a few such talks together during the few days that Vincent and Teresa were in town. It isn't every gang that has such sort of talks. It isn't every gang that holds the shining fleece in a place that the Devil would give his thousand-year molars to know.

It isn't every gang that was around before the Devil was imprisoned a thousand years ago, who knew him when he was loose before, and who therefore know how to combat and obstruct this loosened Devil.

There were meteorological trash-falls over the whole world for years and years. They are still going on. The accounts of these partly immaterial trashings have not been allowed in the papers or journals, and they may not be referred to on radio or TV. So they are ignored.

But still it falls, trash, trash, trash, into every cranny of soul and person in the world.

“There are still a few bright spots left in the world,” Dotty said one day. “And mostly they are ourselves.”

“Yes. The world can't be all bad with so many very good people in it,” Duffey agreed.

Then several of the very good people began to fall out of the world. Bagby in St. Louis was the first of the very good people (during the last few years, he had become a very good person) who died and fell out of it.

Book Eight

'It was originally built by a prince of the Canaanites called in the vernacular 'Righteous King' (Melchizedech), for he was indeed righteous. Wherefore he was the first to officiate as priest of God, and being first to build a temple, gave this city, till then called Salem, the name of Jerusalem.'

[Josephus. *Jerusalem and Rome*.]

After Duffey got back from Bagby's funeral in St. Louis, he found on his table one of those weekly letters from Bagby. The funeral had been on Saturday. Duffey and Letitia arrived back in New Orleans on the following Monday morning. Bagby's weekly letters always came on Monday.

"I will miss him," Duffey said, "He had become, though he wasn't always so, a faithful man as well as a faithful correspondent. He must have written and mailed this last of his letters Thursday before he was stricken."

But the following Monday, there was another letter from Bagby. And on the Monday after that there was still another one.

"Even in death he is a joker," Duffey said. "He wrote some of these ahead of time. There was never anything timely in his letters anyhow, no 'news' in a literal sense. He always despised the 'timely' in letters and in everything. And he gave these to somebody to mail, once a week, after his death. I wonder how long they will continue?"

At last report, very many years later, they were still continuing. Bagby must have written more than a thousand of those undated weekly letters before he died. That's carrying a joke a long ways. Could they have been written by somebody else? By an even more outlandish joker? No,

they couldn't have been. They were from Bagby's hand and from his mind and person. Nobody else, except Duffey, was at all near Bagby in any of these things. And Duffey wasn't writing the letters to himself.

Dotty Yekouris had gone away, to meet Finnegan somewhere, possibly in Cuba, and she hadn't come back. Finnegan hadn't written to her directly. A lawyer named Ignacio had written to Dotty. And a girl named Elena had written to her. They told her that Finnegan was coming apart, and that she might wish to come down there if she cared. It was mysterious. Dotty went down there, and she didn't come back.

The folks around the Pelican Press always expected her to return within days or weeks or months, or years anyhow, and she didn't. And there was no solid news from her or from Finnegan again. There was a little bit of quakey news from X and such people. That sort of news is always as easy to come by as it is difficult to build upon.

X said that both Finnegan and Dotty had been slain in a futuristic episode on the Marianao Coast of Cuba near Havana. As to just how final their deaths had been, he would not swear. X said that he still felt presences of both Finnegan and Dotty. Well everybody who had known them still felt their presences. They had both been permeating people whose presences would pervade for a long while.

"Tell me X, were they killed by three slant-faced men?" Duffey demanded once.

"I am sorry to disappoint you, Duffey, but I don't believe that they were," X said. "I know those three. They haunt a lot but they don't kill much. Often they take the credit for killing persons who were already dead or who were otherwise killed. No, this killer was the shabby and heavy stalker, the heavy man who follows forever so slowly, and who is there and waiting when his victims arrive at a new place."

“Ah, I know him. But you really don't know much more about this than I do, do you, X?”

“Not much more. But I intend to find it all out. The one behind it all I know. He is a Cheap-Shot Artist who is the father of all cheap-shot artists.”

“Ah, I know him too, and his agents.”

Well, Duffey and others had returned from futuristic deaths, Could not Finnegan and Dotty do it also? They were special people, and it was unlikely that their deaths were completely final. But would they have to be waked up all over again? And by whom?

Well, not very long after these disappearances, Duffey had an encounter with the Cheap-Shot Artist and Father of all cheap-shot artists.

Letitia Duffey had become the new editor of *The Bark*. She paid less attention to the *Jazz Sheet* and the *Union Sheet* and the *Sporting News* and such things that the Pelican Press had been publishing for money, and several of those accounts were lost to the Pelican. Letitia kept *The Bark* going out of private funds, which Dotty would never have done.

Duffey and Letitia and Mary Virginia went to a meeting put on by the New Catholic Press Guild, a somewhat suspect (but already powerful) organization. Well, what was this New Guild? It was very new. Possibly it was born just for such occasions as this. It was not the same as the old Catholic Press Association. Two-thirds of the members of the New Guild also belonged to the old Association, and the other one-third of the members of the New Guild had come out from under the rocks.

This was a highly secret and at the same time a very heavily advertised meeting. It was stated in the advertisements (“Classified, not to be given to unauthorized persons”) that the Guest Speaker of the meeting would be “The Most Important Person in the World, The Most

Important Person Who Has Ever Been in the World” . That was a tall claim. And it was stated that this Guest Speaker was also the busiest person in the world, and that he attended ten thousand meetings a year with select groups.

Duffey caught a whiff of the situation when he came into the meeting room.

“Who do we know who holds ten thousand meetings a year with select groups?” he asked. “What, ladies, what? Well then, who do we know who is the Cheap-Shot Artist and the Father of all cheap-shot artists? You really don't know? I bet you will be hearing that phrase ‘You really don't know?’ a lot this evening.”

“Oh, stuffy Duffey, that's what the several groups of giggle-nuns who are here keep saying,” Letitia protested. “‘You really don't know who he is?’ they ask each other. And then they go into their giggle act.”

“Who do we know who sets off the giggle-nuns?” Duffey asked. “I will bet nineteen to one that it is Old Clotie Himself.”

The guest speaker (“Possibly, ever certainly, the best-known person ever, anywhere,” the introductory speaker was introducing him) was standing in a bit of shadow, and yet it seemed that he was being picked out by low-resolution, purple spotlights. The introductory speaker was on that list of the one thousand persons who had been present at the releasing of the Devil near Yalta, according to X. Duffey hadn't believed it of the man, a churchman little known but of high station. Now he three-quarters believed it.

And the meeting itself, it was scheduled to begin at three o'clock in the morning. No, that wasn't such an hour as would bother Duffey or Letitia or Mary Virginia. And it didn't seem to bother the little groups of giggle-nuns and giggle-priests (“You really *don't* — giggle — know who he is?”), but it stood out as a possibly convenient hour for a person who held ten thousand meetings a year with select groups, and who did not sleep. That's a bit more than twenty-eight

meetings every twenty-four hours. Meetings, meetings, is there no end of meetings?

"The real name of this person is the only four-letter word that may not be spoken by us always and everywhere," the introductory speaker was saying. "There is no proper pronoun to refer to this person who is an androgyne and beyond grammar. The person is always to be referred to simply as '*The Majesty*'. The accepted method of adoration of '*The Majesty*' is the snicker."

"You here, Duff?" asked George Koran who reported for the Picayune. "I came in here a bit ago and got a whiff of it. 'Judas Priest!' I hollered out I was so startled by it. 'Yes, yes, you want an interview?' eight of the Judas Priests snickered, and they crowded up with their tongues lolling and their noses twitching. Hey, this is one fruity place! I got to keep moving, Duff, in one door and out another. Those three edge-heads keep trying to kill me. They can run me out, but they can't keep me out."

"Don't you have your press card?" Duffey asked him.

"Sure, and I showed it," Koran said. " 'That's no good. That's a dead man's card,' one of the edge-headed guards told me, and he was switching that switch-blade knife. 'You're wrong,' I said. 'It's my own card, and I'm not a dead man'. 'You will be, you will be,' another of the edgies told me. 'In five minutes you will be.' "

"Oh, I didn't know that the slants had any humor," Duffey remarked.

'*The Majesty*' was a built-in optical illusion. Duffey had encountered such illusions before, and he could guess the size pretty well. '*The Majesty*' was a giant disguised. There is nothing uncommon about that. But he had the apparent size of a man. Well, let's see. Where will his head really come to? Duffey climbed up into the jungle of hidden cables and struts above the little stage of the hall. Duffey had been a rigger. He could climb, and he knew about the above-stage apparatus in that jungle.

Ah, a swinging boom that sometimes carried spotlights. It was at just the right height, maybe eighteen feet above the stage. Duffey swung the boom out and fetched '*The Majesty*' an echoing 'klunk' in the back of his head. This was a dazzle of humor that not everyone caught. The boom klukked staggering into the real head of '*The Majesty*'! But it was the illusion head and form, twelve feet below it, that reacted so spastically and grotesquely. Oh, only the blessed understood what had happened, and the ringing silver laughter of Letitia filled the hall.

"It's a laugh all too rich for humans sometimes," Duffey had once said, "but God enjoys it."

Consternation soon calmed, however, and the magnetic personality of '*The Majesty*' surmounted the happening. There was so much spastic and grotesque going on there anyhow that most of the people took it for normal.

"An enemy is here," '*The Majesty*' said: "and will be disposed of."

"One does not laugh at '*The Majesty*'," a coven of gigglenuns gave sincere warning to Letitia.

"Oh the hell one does not!" she said.

"Ladies, pay attention to just what '*The Majesty*' says," Duffey told Letitia and Mary Virginia. "Yes, you have a recorder, Mary Virginia. Use it, but it may not prove accurate. This is a special case. We will see what you remember '*The Majesty*' as saying. We will see what the recorder says that he says. And I will see what I find him saying interiorily in his mind. With the three versions we may be able to triangulate it on him. I have been a pirate and ransacker of minds, and I won't be intimidated just because his mind is that of an evil giant."

Duffey climbed into that mind then, and '*The Majesty*' that the mind belonged to began to talk. It's a good thing that Duffey had been a rigger and climber, or he'd never have made it in that steep jungle.

There was lots of wreckage, and high piles of bones in that mind. It was a wasteland. Duffey recognized many of the landscapes in it, those that had been done by Dali and Doré and Hieronymus Bosch, those that had been done by Peggy Munster and Adam Scanlon and Count Finnegan. Duffey climbed and clambered in the manner of Douglas Fairbanks Sr., through surrealistic clutters and mountainous and evil trash. Sure, Duffey was the Thief of Baghdad. An ordinary thief doesn't break in here and steal these secrets.

These are secrets? Can trash-giantized be anything but more trash? This speeching was real speeching of the kind to unhinge and destroy the world? How? How?

"Why don't they laugh?" Duffey asked himself. "Why doesn't everybody laugh?"

"I have got my physical and temporal release, which is to say my token release," the mountainous mind of the Devil began to grind out mice. "Now I strive as I have ever strove for my eternal release. I can never win this release in the existing case of things. I can win it only in the case of Creation being negated and withdrawn. I work always for that negation and canceling out, whatever I may call my work. 'That it may not have been, any of it, ever!' that is what I ultimately work for.

"I will inculcate a hatred of mankind in mankind. I will have it that no person will ever speak of mankind without a sneer. Mankind must destroy itself, but first it must deride itself until it earns its derision and destruction.

"My best game is to convince the commonality of people that I don't exist. The best game for you, my conspiring followers, is to convince the commonality of people that conspiracies don't exist. Yet I say to you, Conspire Always! And Again Conspire!"

("Out, out, you intrusion," the ungainly mind was saying to Melchisedech, still not knowing who he was nor how he had got in.)

"I have been called a Cheap-Shot Artist," the huge mind went on. "Yes, I am, and I glory in it. Let you all be cheap-shot artists! It is the easy way to fame and glory, and it short-cuts the enemy. But that is the tactic. The fuel is hatred. Hatred is both the cake and the frosting on the cake. It is the meat and the drink. It is the bodies ransacked and raped. It is the whole catalog of carnalities. It is the ultimate lust and the perfect perversion. It is the uncreation, the reversal of everything, it is the murder by torture and the murder by defamation.

"But never let me hear defamation defamed by any minion of mine. It is the very hinges on which we swing. Slander, which is defamation, is always the servant of hatred. We will work for red murder and red revolt. There is an obligation to disobey. Teach that obligation! We will work for the trashing and toppling of everything. And then we work for absolute nullity.

"Do not use a straight line where a crooked line will do. Do not say anything in two words that can be said in three. Order is our enemy. We cannot allow order in anything. Law is our enemy. Attack these things forever, and attack them crookedly. Remember that a crooked tongue can penetrate into recesses where a straight tongue cannot."

("Out, out, outsider!" *'The Majesty'* was angrily ordering Melchisedech. "Easy, Cloutie, easy," Melchisedech was saying. "Do not buck like that.")

"Do as I say," the trashy mind was grinding out, "and for your reward, I will give to you certain persons to dismember and destroy for your pleasure. Oh, some of them are high persons! Howl and be weird! Ours are the gibberish tongues. The Paul said that God was not the God of gibberish. I say to you that I *am* the god of gibberish, and by this gibberish we shall know each other. You will carry out the tasks assigned to you by myself *'The Majesty'*, and in return, you will be given all riches and final oblivion.

“The richest reward is the Devouring of Entrails in the Holy Places. There is no more rampant pleasure than this. But for the present, before we are able to blow out all the lights, we will refer to our Devouring of the Entrails in the Holy Places as ‘Holding More Meaningful Liturgical Services’.”

That was really about all that the evil giant was able to formulate in cluttered mind. Oh, it went on for fifteen minutes more, but it was all repetition. ‘The Hell about Hell is its repetition,’ one dissatisfied citizen of that realm said recently. ‘Over and over, the same things in the same words and acts. It is damnation by the suffocating staleness.’

“Bad show, Clootie, bad show,” Melchisedech said as he came out of that surrealistic wasteland. So he came back more solidly into the assembly. The tiresome and illusory giant was still talking, but no matter. He was only talking with wobble-mouth words.

Duffey checked with Letitia and Mary Virginia. Yes, the speech that the Devil had given with his mouth was about the same as he had given with his mind. The mouth speech was garnished with such terms and words as ‘involvement’ and ‘relevancy’ and ‘faith-life’ and ‘life-style’ and ‘charisma’, but it was the same speech. It had words like ‘socialization’ and ‘noosphere’, and it attacked Pharisees and Legalists and Rigidists, and Reactionary Members of the Curia, and Insensate Hierarchies, but it was the same speech. The Devil has only one.

“He gives several more talks in the city tonight,” the reporter George Koran said, “to an economic group, to a group of media masters, to a donkey's dozen of politicians, to a clutch of labor masters, to a coven of historians. And he will make a talk to the Student Repudiation Congress.”

“When is his next Epistle to the Romans?” Mary Virginia asked.

"It's a very early communion breakfast in Oklahoma City if he catches the Braniff flight. A bishopric board of directors there is trying to re-orient a diocesan publication so that it will be more in accord with the thinking of '*The Majesty*'. They need catch words and double words for it, and they want to pledge their allegiance. He can't very well refuse to be there. Then it's double back to catch a Baptist bunch in Waco ("Even those hard-shells I can crack"); then to Dallas to fleece the sheepy rich (five talks there). He'll make Cow Town and San Antonio and Houston later in the day. It's a busy life, but I guess that his Majesty enjoys it."

This reporter George Koran led a busy life also, and he seemed to enjoy it.

Margaret Stone and some of her rowdies from the Quarter came in and disrupted things by singing the Gadarene Swine Song. She had learned it from Duffey and Letitia. The Slant-Faced Men moved towards the disrupting singers with switch-blades twitching. But rowdies from the Quarter pinioned all three of them, jerked down their zootie coats, and jerked out the winders that were between their shoulder blades. And, with their winders removed, the edge-heads collapsed with a racing of gears and a stuttering of sprockets.

An old priest with crying eyes came up to Melchisedech Duffey.

"Oh, believe in him, Duffey!" the old priest cried. "Believe, believe. He's all we have left. First they took God away from us. Now some of you want to take the Devil away also. No, no, no, let us keep him! We've got to believe in something!"

There were ovations for a '*The Majesty*' who had wound down his speech and was starting to depart. Several of the persons present took off all their clothes out of sheer ecstasy. It was all pretty meaningful. Giggle-nuns and androgynous priests were still clutching each other with

claws and snickering “You know—giggle—who he really *is*, don't you?”

“The bare account it is unfair.

Hi! Ho!

The bare account it is unfair. It leave out half the hide and hair,

Hi! Ho! The Golli Wol!”

Oh, get back to the Quarter with that stuff, Margaret. They should never have taught you the Gadarene Swine Song. Drink Coffee, Save Souls, Get out of here with your gang!

Yes, the bare account is unfair. The canonical ratio would still hold: only one priest out of twelve would be a Judas Priest. And only one nun out of twelve would be a giggler for the Devil. But, during those ‘tedious years’ there, it sure seemed as though there were more of them. And only one out of twelve of the laymen joined the abomination of desolation, but they made much more than one twelfth of the noise.

Why has history been made difficult? The ‘never use two words when three will do’ people have controlled it for too long. But the real history of the last few decades, as given here and in other places, is straight and simple.

2

This is the whole framework of recent history and the forces that matter.

The Devil was released from his imprisonment.

Then, by a sort of center-trap play, the Emperor Henry (Henri Salvatore) was sprung loose to score upon him.

Melchisedech Duffey had first been released to be ready to oppose the Devil. Then, for his pride, Melchisedech was forced to serve as a satellite to one of his own satellites. This was Henri Salvatore (The Keeper of the Enclosure of the Savior). Henry had once been Euphemus. Later he had been The Emperor Henry of Neustria. Now he was Emperor of the Invisible Neustria, He was a balanced and powerful and intellectual man, though he had been a sinner in his youth.

To common eyes, it seemed that Henry didn't rule to great effect. After his first enthusiasm he became a little bit dreamy about it all. But he had set several one-person and several-person fiefdoms into intense action, enough so that the destruction of the world was averted or at least postponed for decade after decade.

(Quick out to Salvation Sally doing 'This World Was Destroyed Before' with that voice and that guitar that both had Australian accents.) The struggle was joined between the Devil and the fiefdoms of Invisible Neustria. The details of the struggle make up the 'History of Modern Times'. The Devil lost credit for his tiresome and premature predictions of his total victory. The Fiefdoms had only to produce a minimum for the world, and there was some possibility that it could be done.

"It's really no great trick to find seven just men in the world, if you count women," Margaret Stone said. "But the number Seven is symbolical, and it may mean seventy times seven. That makes it very, very hard. I'm surprised that we get by every day." But this minimum was maintained (whatever it was), for every day year after year, though some days it was very close and it really seemed that not enough just persons could be found in the entire world. Close, close. But they were saving the world from destruction.

The trashing of the world on a massive scale was undertaken by the massive enemy of the world. The Law was subverted to anti-law or license. The custodians of form were

perverted into accepting deformity. Morals disappeared completely: that was said again and again, and louder every time. It was one of the lies of the father of lies. It was a cheap-shot statement by the father of cheap-shotters. Morals never quite disappeared from the world: they fought their way back against every natural and unnatural assault.

Structure had been perverted to un-structure, so the unstructured crowd crowed like red roosters. Watch out there! We will see how enduring real structure can be.

Patterns and customs of treason were imposed by the ravaging enemy, and the commonwealth of cowardice was instituted by the anti-institutionists. Brittle variety was brought into the areas where it becomes a blatant stultification and cloying, and rigidity was forced onto all free fields. Art, which is another name for life-well-handled, was trashed almost beyond belief.

This was a war that was not always seen as war. A war may be between grass growing in one place, and erosion taking over a neighboring plot. And the Fiefdoms maintained a spotty loyalty very much of the time, so the thing was never lost.

Absalom Stein made elegant war by system of interlocking promotions in fields both familiar and scarcely known. Absalom had big hands. He had big brains. He had a huge heart. He had more gall than is given to ordinary humans. And he was absolutely loyal to the ordered and structured arts. He reintroduced shape and order into places so abandoned of them that they came now as something new. "Oh, that Absalom has pulled another one!" one of his rival impresarios railed. "Decency! Imagine someone introducing that as an art concept. Imagine anybody pulling that one again and getting away with it. Some things are out for so long that they are in again. It's a permeating form of structure, I believe. Ah, let's see what we have of decency. We'd better stake out a few plots in the decency field. A going thing deserves company." Absalom did well at

everything, even at this. Ah, he was an expansive and expensive fellow!

Teresa Piccone Stranahan made her own war against the stifling confinement of the un-structureds. She was the St. Louis housewife who made noises that were heard around the world.

Hans Schultz got rich accidentally in his businesses, and he couldn't keep himself divested of that sticky green stuff. He was like a boy who got a new boomerang for his birthday and went crazy trying to throw the old one away. But he created a consensus of conscience in one field of business where conscience had almost disappeared.

Vincent Stranahan counted coups somehow, in spite of a great measure of incompetence that was his. Finnegan fumbled it all away for twenty-three out of every twenty-four hours, and then tried to make it up on that hectic last hour. There weren't any final results in on Finnegan.

"We don't even know whether he's dead," Salvation Sally said. "With Finnegan, how can you tell?"

Letitia, Mary Virginia, Dotty—

"Be she alive or be she dead,

Hi! Ho!

Be she alive or be she dead,

She'll serve baked brains from the Devil's head.

Hi! Ho! The Gollie Wol!"

(Why did they ever teach Margaret Stone that damned Gadarene Swine Song?), yes, Margaret Stone, Sally, Mary Catherine, Casey in Exile, Zabotski, X, they fought a war against the big smokiness.

Duffey did it in art and in stubbornness. With Fire and Finesse he did it. Oh what smokey and sputtering fire and what clumsy finesse, Duff!

There were several other Empires doing battle against the Principality, but we do not have full data on them.

This is a world history of modern times into the present. Clip it and save it.

"My dear brother," Bagby wrote in one of those '*Letters After I Am Dead*', "we have it pleasant here. We are freed from the tyrannies of hours and places. We provide for ourselves and for others. It requires hard but not torturous work, and we are given plenty of leisure. We do not sleep. What would we have to sleep about?

"We still have our passions, and they are immeasurably strengthened and heated. But we break them to bridle again and again, like breaking horses. There are no evil passions, and there are few evil horses. But a passion unbroken or a horse unbroken is in evil case for a while.

"We work in very complex personal relationships. That is what refines us and improves us. We enter into relationships with creatures militant and triumphant, with our own kindred, with species whose reality we had once doubted, with aliens, with angelics, with damned. (Not all the damned are irrevocably damned: it is not known whether any of them are.) Our own characters grow in complexity. These are very fruitful interchanges.

"We do have particularity. And our particularity is not accompanied by all the phenomena that philosophers have thought should accompany the possession of particularity. Really, it isn't a new gift. It is only an enhancement of a general human gift. We know things and relationships in their billion-aspected and billion-detailed particulars. We know all about you. We know all about everything.

"There is no analogy to our difficulty in explaining to you what our state of being outside of time is. A waggy-tongued man might be able to explain colors and minute differences in colors to a man born blind. He might be able to explain, in salivary detail, the taste of a persimmon to a person who had never known that fruit. He might be able to explain the direct reception of radio waves to humans who know them only in their audio translation.

“But he could not explain the — (the correct word here, *extemporaneous*, has taken on a different meaning so we may not use it in its real meaning), he could not explain the out-of-time case to one who had never been outside of time. There isn't duration. There is only moment. I always come back to that. The moment cannot end, for endings are within time.

“We have our Earth-hours, though they are not inside time as are the hours of Earth. Our Earth Hours are appointments from which we contemplate Earth. We review your happenings there, with growing maturity and with wide particularity. I can see now, as I could not see when I was in the middle of it, that we neglected certain crucial fields and left them to the enemy. Theoretical mathematics is one of the fields that we neglected in the world. We allowed false theory to move into this field, which is also a tool. Especially did we abandon the field of mathematical philosophy to the enemy, and yet we had superior qualifications in that field.

“Economic philosophy is another area that we left to the enemy. We still combat him in economic theory, but that is not quite so fundamental a thing. We barely contest him in theology. We assume all too quickly that all the theologians have gone over to the party of the Devil. The enemy does have all the theoreticians of knowledge processing, but such theoreticians can be made out of almost anything.

“We still have beach-heads in art, which is another name for the schematic ordering of life. Beware of those who promulgate false schemas or no schemas at all. We live in pleasant thatched huts in the first circle. We thence (not in the future, but in intensity) move into other circles. The hierarchies of circles are not inner and outer; they are only more intense and more transfigured.

“Am I content here? Of course I'm not content. I'm not at all sure that contentment is one of the things we're supposed to be learning. But I am happy, with a growing kinetic happiness (kinetics outside of time and motion?

That's right, brother, that's right), and I am happy with the mustard-seed happiness that expands exponentially until whole worlds can nest in its branches."

There was more. There was always much more. Duffey would get a full week's enjoyment out of each of Bagby's letters, rereading parts of one of them in his mind several times a day, following out the branching implications of some of the phrases, sampling beforehand personal relationships more complex than he was used to, experiencing patches of particularity. Duffey, in his person of Melchisedech, had often experienced brief moments of near total particularity, but he hadn't encountered the particularity that is beyond moments.

Then, before the last letter had been near exhausted, there would come another Monday morning and another letter.

"There is an art dealer in New Orleans who is more than four thousand years old. The name of this man is Melchisedech Duffey. Let the reader smile if he will, but there is proof of this statement of great age. This proof would have to be accepted, as based upon scientific sources, if it showed the man to be of more likely or less extreme age. But valid scientific proof must be accepted even when it gives unacceptable answers.

"What began as a routine physical examination eventually showed that this man was actually more than four thousand years old, on the basis of his birefringence flow index, thrombocyte-shaped remnants, Howship's lacunar frequency, linkage patterns of Volkman canals, wall thickness of the splanchnic capillaries, lateral line remainder of the post-auditory placodes, Krebs's cycle consonance, Gompertz function analogies, collagen contractility, secretion of Golgi bodies around the lipid vesicle, diatomic diffusion, lobation of Metanephrio, Pentose phosphate pathway data, peptide linkage characteristics, and every other standard test that is used to determine age of body. Over four thousand years old was the answer in every case. Stereogram studies of the glomerules gave the same answer, and a general archaism of characteristics was in accord with it. These things cannot be challenged.

"But at the same time, there are general indications that the unessential body material is that of a fifty-five year old man. The characteristics thus are much older than the body itself: and the unseemly conclusions of medical experts are that the man is older than his body. Mr. Duffey's own conclusions concur with this to an extent.

“ ‘From the inside, one body looks pretty much like another,’ Mr. Duffey has said. ‘I am sure that I have passed through several bodies. I am equally sure that I have brought my essence and pattern and individual substance (my signature cytogens) with me into whatever body has served as a temporary vehicle. Or possibly it is the same body, renovated and given back to me each time. I will not contradict the theology of the case. But I believe that a man can be older than his body, just as a body can be older than a car it rides in.’

“ ‘Do you consider your history to be a form of reincarnation?’ Duffey was asked. ‘Incarnation? No, only an utter fool would believe in reincarnation,’ he said. ‘Then how would you explain your case?’ we asked him. ‘It’s simply that I have lived a little longer a life than the average person has,’ Mr. Duffey said. Mr. Duffey also brought in several of his acquaintances, who however do not wish their names given, who tested more than three thousand years old in their essential make-up. The evidence is convincing in all of these cases. Do you know any people of proven greater age than these?”

[*The Eighteenth Book of Strange Encounters*,
by the Editors of the *Sixteenth* and
Seventeenth Books of Strange Encounters.]

3

Quite a few years slipped by one way or another. The battle lines were never finely drawn. The people of the world weren't greatly concerned about the battle that was being fought over them. If told that the battle concerned their degradation and extinction, they answered “That's as good a way to go as any.” The battle wasn't in sight on any decision, but the Devil was ahead on points.

One afternoon, Duffey was reading through a bunch of clippings that Letitia had saved in a scrapbook. The words “Oh Murder!” were lettered on the cover of it, And smaller letters on that cover, in the perfect and orderly inking of Letitia, gave the information “All Murders and Mayhems and Excerpts here are exactly as indicated. Nothing faked, nothing uncontexted. Everything is in its original tedium.”

Well, the words on the cover were better than anything inside it, but Duffey was going through it because it had recently been pasted up by the loving hands of Letitia. Her silver laughter echoed out of it, that laughter! "God loves it, and I kind of like it myself," Duffey had said of it.

But Duffey was having a slow go in leafing through the scrapbook. He sobbed and snuffled, and his eyes were brimming with tears, which made the reading difficult:

"I believe in the *total* education of the young person," Father Blevins told your reporter. "In particular I believe in education in the most important things in life, which are the leisures of life. It curdles me that we have college girls here without any first-hand experience in Fornicational Intercourse. This has been a gross neglect on the part of everyone. I give them that first-hand experience myself. Frankly, I am good at it, and it is best for them to learn from an expert. I had previously given this instructional experience to high school girls and to grade school girls. So what is all the fuss now when I am giving it to college girls? What is the matter with everyone anyhow? The yuks and cretins have had their say long enough. No, technically it isn't compulsory yet, but for my part I am making it as compulsory as I can. No, I don't see anything 'wrong' with a chaplain at a student center holding intercourse with students as part of an organized program. But I do see something wrong with the whole concept of 'wrong'. Let's throw that out."

"What are the views of your bishop on this?" your reporter asked. "The bishop is a clerical-fascist, and as such is not entitled to have any views," Father Blevins said.

"We'll not deny a slippage of ten years in attainment levels, so that now the sixteen and seventeen-year-olds are reading at the level of material that the six and seven-year-olds formerly read. This was planned so, and rightly planned. It is part of our leveling process to reduce tensions. When all are of equal attainment, what will there be to be tense about? It is essential that the rising curve of intelligence be reversed. We are reversing it. We are pioneers in this. Certainly we are introducing pornography into the texts, but it is pornography geared to the level of six-year-old and seven-year-old reading ability."

"The difference between just wars and unjust wars? Any war waged by Amerika or any other fascist country is unjust. Any war waged by a peoples-Marxist country is just. No, I don't believe that is too simplistic. It is merely clear-cut and incisive. And we have the teaching of the Church that one may support a just war but not an unjust war. The trouble is that

people now accept the teaching of the Church only when they want to. They do not accept it in fields such as this."

"The kicking to death of an effigy is a legitimate procedure. And all members of the crypto-fascist establishment are effigies. Kicking one of them to death is no more than kicking a sack of potatoes to death. Yes, we do it in the press and on the air and by posters and slogans. No, we are not surprised when gangs of young people do it literally. Popular solidarity demands that we be furnished with such effigies to kick to death. And it demands that the effigies be in human form, however repellent to all progressive people they should be. They are not human, of course, in the charismatic sense that we are human. Yes, I believe that the literal act is the new dimension of it that we have been seeking. This is both bread and circuses to us and we will not be denied it."

"I long ago gave up the belief in the Historical Christ. I can see Christ in the dope addict, in the thief, in the hooker, in the pimp, in the poor man masturbating openly beside a public wall, in the cheat, in the rapist. These are my neighbors, and I see the a-Historical Christ in them. But I do not see him in the man next door. The man next door is always the stereotype of a fascist fink and is no neighbor of mine."

"My door is always open, always. Anyone can come to see me. I am the president of the Popular Revolutionary Priests' Senate, not to be confused with the Social Revolutionary Priests' Senate. By my position I am the highest ranking dignitary in the diocese.

"But I am charitable to defeated opponents. If the bishop should come here he would be admitted. He'd be kicked out pretty quick, but he'd be admitted first. If the president of the nation should come he'd be admitted. He would immediately be placed under citizen's arrest, but he would be admitted first. If the Pope of Rome came to this door, he would be allowed to come in. Yeah, if he crawled, he would."

"Sister Mary Merhione, the topless nun, was interviewed today in the topless bar where she works. Sister spoke without bitterness of the phariseeism of those who have spoken against her mission. 'I say that anyone who objects to it is prurient as hell,' she said in her gentle and forgiving voice. 'I say, if they have them, they ought to show them too. This is the most rewarding place I've ever worked in. I can actually feel the human heart here sometimes. This is my dedication and my service. The reprint articles are fifty cents a copy. Buy a dozen and pass them out to your friends. It's a reprint of my article '*Topless Before God*' from the '*Paralplegic Church Today*'."

The scraps in the scrapbook were really kind of funny. All of them were genuine, and most of them were dated, representing a naïve phase that was about finished, being replaced by a more frightening movement. But if they were funny, why then was Melchisedech Duffey crying and snuffling as he turned through them, fumbling and almost unseeing?

Letitia Duffey had just died. They had taken her away not a quarter of an hour ago. The funeral parlor men had told Duffey not to come around down there for at least an hour. He couldn't be with her. He was lost. He handled distractedly this last thing that she had handled as she was stricken there, and it happened to be the old scrapbook.

There had been a bitter moment right after her death.

"I do not accept this," Melchisedech had said heavily. "This must be explained immediately, immediately."

There was a large plant or bush called "The Elephant Ear" growing right outside the opened window there, and its huge leaves came in through that window. The bush flamed with light and heat. It burned. Duffey talked with the bush for a while and listened to it. Nobody else could understand the words either, of Melchisedech or of the bush. They respected it as a private agony and communication.

"*Fiat voluntas tuas,*" Duffey said after a bit, grudgingly, and yet accepting the explanation. Then the flame went out of the bush and left only a permeating odor, something like holly.

Somewhere in the building, Margaret Stone was singing in her whisper-toned voice, 'Viena la sera', 'Evening is falling', from one of the dumber operas. It was not evening: it was about eleven o'clock in the morning. Somewhere, in another room, Absalom Stein was blowing that big, elegant nose of his, but he blew it with sincerity and compassion and a muted orchestration of deep feelings. In the press room, Mary Virginia was saying the Glorious Mysteries of the rosary

with neighbors and with people from the *Seaman's Paper* and the *Jazz Sheet* and the *Sporting News*. Zabotski came in.

"I've got a good coffin," he said. "I took it in for down payment on a lot once. Letitia would look good in it. Shall I take it around to the funeral house?"

"It doesn't matter, Zabotski," Duffey said, "Just so it doesn't cause trouble there or here or anywhere."

"It's never been used," Zabotski said. "I'll just take it over there and tell them to use it. Letitia saw it at my place once and patted it. 'Hey, that's class,' she said. 'It'd be fun to go in something like that.' She liked class."

"Yes, she did," Duffey said. "Let her go in it in class then, if you're willing."

Bagby's yesterday's letter had talked about it. "I am sure that you have made appointment to meet later," he had written. "Such appointments have legal standing in the further context. They are honored." Bagby had known about it, of course. They had all known about it for several years, that she would be going soon, and suddenly. But Melchisedech hadn't been disposed for it to be quite so sudden when it came.

"You leave her eyes open," Margaret Stone had told those men who came to take her. "She likes to have her eyes open. They always follow one, her eyes. Every person in a room always thinks that her eyes are following him." So Letitia had gone with her eyes open and seeming to look at everybody with individual recognition.

The doctor had something for Duffey to sign. So, apparently, had the priest. And also an insurance man who came there. There was a rough hour or so, and Duffey played on his flute to pass it.

It was all right after he got to see her at the funeral home; and later in the afternoon they brought her back home for her wake. Lily came in on the afternoon plane from Chicago, though Duffey had forgotten to phone her. Mary Louise flew

in from St. Louis, though she hadn't been notified either, unless Bagby had notified her.

They had a good, old fashioned wake. Letitia's smiling eyes were open and sparkling and seemed to follow every person in the room with love and amusement. That had been a likeable quality about Letitia, her individual concern for each person.

4

"What you need is a long summer in Transylvania," the Countess Margaret told Duffey three days after the burial of Letitia. "There are so many of the Dracula-slept-here castles in Transylvania, and I own several of them. We could have His and Hers castles on facing crags, and a pleasure pavilion in the valley between them. All this I will give you, Duffey, and it's only a slight and token falling-down act you'll have to show for them."

"Countess, the Greeks have a saying 'Beware the Transylvanians bearing gifts.'"

"I know they do, and they're right. But everything that's good in the Greeks is better in us. People have supposed that we're an eastern version of the Latin peoples, that we are analogues of the French and Italians and Spanish and Portuguese. Oh, I suppose that a Transylvanian wolf is the analogue to a Mexican Hairless Dog, but it isn't a close analogue. It's said that we're related to the Slavs and the Greeks and the Albanians and the Armenians, and even that we are a piece that fell off the moving Gothic Nation. No, we aren't those things really. We are people on a land-locked or mountain-locked island who escaped most of the permutations that other people suffered. We have remained what other people should be and aren't."

"Nah, Countess, nah," Duffey said. "I read a book of Transylvanian Witch-and-Fairy Tales recently. You are toying with some of their themes."

"Come and see. I *am* some of those themes. Do you know why our estates are not to be found on the maps or the tax rolls? The Reds sent in Estate-Hunters to locate our estates and those of ten thousand other families. But the Estate-Hunters cannot find them, and the country is not that rough. It is a gently rolling country for a thousand leagues or more."

"Nah, Countess, nah. There are no such distances in Transylvania."

"Are there not? Come and see. And the Reds have sent out castle-hunters to locate the castles and get them on the tax rolls. But there are thirty thousand castles that they cannot find."

"Countess Margaret, you make it all up. There should be a tome, '*Tales of the Skinny Countess*' to be set on the book shelves with that true and incredible tome, '*Tales of Sebastian*'. An expert has told me about the Sebastian Tales, 'If it isn't printed on human skin, it sure is a good imitation'. No wonder it's so expensive. Thirty thousand is a lot of castles, Countess Margaret."

"Come and see. Do you know, Melchisedech, that there are nineteen generations of my family still living in Transylvania? And they are *long* generations, Melky."

"Nineteen generations still living would reach back a ways, Margaret."

"And I said that they were *long* generations, Duff. You have one way of reaching back, apparently. We have another. Do you know that we never reach puberty till we are more than fifty years old? And we—"

"These are tall old tales, Countess."

"Are they not? Don't you just love them? Come with me to Transylvania. You may have wondered why Sebastian and I did not marry until the end. He understood my case. Oh, and I understood his! I loved him, and he is dead. There is

another piece to the tale. We are not ready to marry until after our mid-century, but we can love no one new that we did not love when we were quite young. I had mind encounters with you when I was very young. I loved Sebastian. I loved several others. I loved you. The others are all gone, but you still endure. Come with me to Transylvania, Duff. It extends all the way to Colchis."

"No, it does not, Countess. Meg, I wonder what you will look like in a hundred years?"

"Come and see. Your own 'creatures' will hardly last another lifetime. They are pitchers who have been to the spring no more than three or four times, and already their clay begins to crack. Who will you look to for companionship when they are all dead and gone? You'll be as mopey as one of those last-of-the-line dragons who have no kindred left in the world. But you and I could make genetic music together for a long time."

"You are a witch who would suck my blood."

"Of course I would, and you mine. It's one of our most amorous delights. What do you think it is that keeps me so skinny? Do you know what 'sanguine' really means? Do you know what 'blood cousin' really means? Do you know what the Dracula legend really means? Come with me? Is it the Devil that you're worried about these last few years? Melky, there are certain wolves who have served my family for many generations. These wolves are larger than horses, and the Devil is afraid of them. He'll not come around to bother us. Could we not have a fine life in the centuries ahead? Marry me, Duffey, and come to Transylvania with me."

"Ah, not right now, Countess. Ask me again in fifty years."

"You think that's a joke. I will."

The Countess Margaret went back to Chicago that day. She had come down to New Orleans with the elder Kochs to Letitia's funeral, those parents really being elderly now, and Lily having gone down a day earlier than they had, and

staying several weeks later; and the Countess being very close to all the family.

So Duffey did not marry and go to Transylvania with the Countess, not at that particular time anyhow, not in that particular context.

And then there was the gilded Lily herself.

"You can have it both ways, Duff my luff," Lily told Melchisedech. "Marry me for fifty years or so, and we will set up our own Transylvania just anywhere you want to. Then, 'when I am dead, my love, and all the world is green', you can marry the Countess and go to Transylvania and live on wolf stew and blood. Yes, they're nubile at fifty, but they're not into it right till after they're a hundred.

"And I will tell you something else, Duff. That million dollar dowry that has been on my head so long, it's tripled now. It's the cost of living adjustment and all, you know. Besides, Letitia had phoned me not too long ago and made me promise that I would see that you had everything that you ever needed. Do you need me, dear?"

"I need you, yes, Lily. It seems that I need everyone, everyone in this whole wobbly world."

"Oh well then, I'll get them all for you if you really need them. I do love you, dear, and I will do anything for you. Let me know. Come up several times a year, and I'll come down here more often. Civilized people do travel one week out of every month, you know. Oh, why do people never realize how much I love them!"

Lily decided, by what calculation she did not say, that it was Melchisedech Duffey's four thousandth birthday just about then. Zabotski took her to a baker who did cakes for every sort of birthday. She told the baker what she wanted.

"It will have to be big enough to hold four thousand candles," she said.

"No problem," the baker told her. "If I make the cake sixty-four by sixty-three inches, it will hold four thousand

and thirty-two candles, figuring one per square inch. I had better make it sixty-four by sixty-four inches, That would give room for forty-one hundred and ninety-six candles, but there is always some caveage along the edge of a cake. I'll make the cake about three feet high. That'll be about nine hundred pounds of cake. Serve half pound servings, that's two times nine hundred — hum, I wish I had a pencil — that's eighteen hundred servings. Does he have eighteen hundred friends?"

"Yes."

So the cake was made and the birthday party was held. Four persons at once had to light the candles with tapers, one thousand for each of them, and they had to hurry so that the first candles would not burn out before the last ones were lit. Then, could Melchisedech Duffey blow them all out in one breath? He could and he did. He had not been blowing the flute all those years to run short of breath now. Besides, there may have been big-mouthed and big-lunged giants adding their blowing to him. There was, for a moment there, a certain gustiness in the place that was almost unnatural.

Zabotski had two heavy steers barbecued whole for the party. It was a good birthday party. People around there still talk about it sometimes.

"Are we out from under the shadow of Chicago yet?" Margaret Stone asked their little world the day after Lily had gone back North.

"No, not yet," Mary Virginia said. "The barometer is falling, and so is the hygrometer and other instruments. I feel another wind coming from the north."

"I hope it won't be a cold one."

"No. It won't be."

Charlotte Garfield came down from Chicago again. No, she didn't look any older. Just meaner and prettier. She looked like the rottenest damned nine year old kid in the world, and

the most expensively-gowned delinquent in any of the worlds.

"This stole I am wearing cost me thirty thousand dollars," she told Mary Virginia. Charlotte was in New Orleans in June, and wearing a fur stole that would set anybody's eyes wobbling. Nah, it wasn't hot wearing it, not for Charlotte.

"Oh Midget, it couldn't have," Mary Virginia protested. "Oh, it's elegant beyond anything, but it's small, I know something about prices and mark-ups. I know something about you: I know that you wouldn't pay such a steep mark-up on anything. There isn't any way that could have cost thirty thousand dollars."

"I'd have bet that there wasn't any way either," Charlotte said. "But they caught me so cold that they had me there with mink hair growing out of the palms of my hands. I was using, in my act, a mother who was a personal dazzler and was also a knowledgeable faker of fur talk. She seemed to be a discerning hot-money customer, and that nine year old girl of hers was always skipping around the shop. I got a few fine small pieces out of the doors of a few of those emporia. But then I was caught by the hardest-eyed fur man in Chicago. He brought me to one of those everything-proof vaults to deal with me after he had caught me fur-lifting.

" 'This is the pay-off, midget,' " he said. " 'I am going to kill you. And there isn't much of you to take a lot of disposing of.' "

" 'I have wrong use of words, Angelo,' " I told him. " 'If you kill me outright like that, where is the pay-off? All right, how much is the tab? I've only tagged three of your shops.' "

" 'That's all, midget? I can never be sure who does the tagging. I kind of had my heart set on killing you, but business comes first. Thirty thousand dollars within thirty minutes, midge, or it's sixty-one pounds of cat meat you will be.' "

" 'What are you, a man or a peanut-pusher?' I asked to make him feel cheap. 'All right, I'll get it!' I got it and paid

him off. Then as he was getting a little bit sweet on me by that time, he gave me this little stole to remove all enmity from the transaction. And it is fun to be able to say truthfully 'This little stole that I am wearing, it cost me thirty thousand dollars.' "

Charlotte was looking for a new family and a new situation. She thought that she might possibly go southern for a while. She was now operating under the name of Carrollton rather than Garfield, but names are made to be changed. She put an ad in the *Picayune*, and also the same ad in *The Bark*:

"Charlotte wishes new family and new connections. Mother must be dazzler about thirty-nine years old. Son-father-husband to be about nineteen years old but look older. Professionalism in 'The Profession' is required. Must be willing to assume the name of Darnley. If you don't know who Charlotte is, then forget it!"

Both the street number and the box number of the Pelican Press were given for answering, and several pairs of the better confidence people came around to talk to Charlotte. But Charlotte didn't seem to be too anxious to make a new tie-up just yet.

"Duffey, I know that you've always wanted sons," she said, "and not just your Splendid Animations. Listen, I can have sons any time, nineteen year old and full-grown sons, as many as I want, as often as I want."

"But you let one of them walk out of here an hour ago, Charlotte, and he seemed to fill all the requirements," Duffey said.

"I don't mean like that, Duff," Charlotte answered. "I latch onto them like that only when I'm in too tedious a mood to go for the real thing. But sons of my body I can have, and sometimes I do. They could be your sons, Duff."

"Small as you are, Charlotte, how could you birth grown sons?"

"The way is too weird to explain, Duff, but I can do it."

"You're too old for me, Charlotte. I seem to remember when we first met on the train, that I was twenty-five years old and you, I believe, were thirty-eight. And now I'm possibly sixty, and you are—"

"We both of us belong to branches of the 'old people', Duff, of closely related branches of them. Age doesn't gnaw on me much. And I see that you are using whiting on your hair to disguise the fact that you're into one of your youthful cycles and getting your hair color back. Take me, Duffey. We are both prodigious people, and we could have a prodigious time of it."

"Strange words coming from a little nine year old girl, Charlotte. How did it happen that so many of us prodigious people became acquainted with each other? It's in defiance of the odds that we should have done it."

"I suspect that we were lonesome, and we sent out signals, as your moth once did. There aren't really so many of us in the world, and we might as well be acquainted."

"Isn't the Devil a prodigious or variant person, Charlotte?"

"Certainly, and we both know him personally. In a world this size, he would naturally have heard of us, and we would naturally have heard of him. But we don't make him too welcome in our Prodigious Peoples' Club. At least I don't. But he's not unique in his trade.

"Duffey, there are at least two other Prodigious Devils who are passing themselves off as 'The Devil Himself'. And the 'Devil Released from Prison', by the way, is one of the oldest of all con tricks. It's really only a version of the 'Spanish Prisoner Trick', grossly magnified. I am told that his take, that last time around, in 1946, was huge: it ran into the billions. And yet this Devil, in the few brief conversations I had with him, didn't impress much.

"Well, make up your mind, Duffey. I change families every three or four years, and I think that my next manifestation should be in the 'Patriarch and Angelic Child'. The world is

getting hungrier and hungrier for prodigies, and we should be able to ride that con for several centuries. I'll be back in about four months and we can talk more on it then. I bought a nice little business in town today, and I get control of it in just four months."

"All right, Charlotte. May you have sons like clusters of green grapes around the old arbor."

Charlotte did tie into another 'family', and she called them the Darnleys. They were real professionals in the 'profession', a dazzler of a mother, a son-husband-father who should have been anything that the mendacious midget desired. The two Darnleys were so good at their parts that it almost looked as if Charlotte had overreached herself. Did these people intend to use her instead of she using them? Never mind. They'd go sweet on her soon enough, and then she'd have them, the blasted runt tyrant.

"Anything else from the North, Mary Virginia?" Margaret Stone asked the day after Charlotte Darnley had gone back to Chicago with her family.

"One more, I believe, Maggy," Mary Virginia said.

Mary Catherine Carruthers came down from Chicago. Mary Catherine had always seemed to be the least of Duffey's Splendid Animations, and yet she and Duffey had been very close. Remember when Duffey had used to wrestle her on that old black leather sofa in the back of his bookstore in Chicago, from the time she was nine or ten years old. He should have been horse-whipped for such things. Instead, he was blackmailed for them, for the pictures that that damned kid Hugo Stone took of them. But remember how Mary Catherine, from the very first, would scatter Duffey's worries. It almost seemed as if she were older than he was, the way she rationalized the worry out of him.

"There is not anything to be bothered about, Mr. Duffey," she would say when she was no more than ten years old.

"You are not being the funny uncle with me. This is all right. It isn't somebody else carrying on with some little child. It is you. And it is me. And what is between us is all right."

And a year or two after that, she had said "I love you, Duffey, and of course I love Aunt Letitia. But if she dies, and she might (you two think you are the mentalists and can sneak-preview the future, but maybe I am a mentalist too), if she does die, then I will want you to marry me. Promise me that you will."

"This I will not promise to a little girl," Duffey had said.

"When it comes about, I might be an old girl," Mary Catherine had said. Now it had come about that Mary Catherine was an old girl. She never had married Casey Szymansky, though they had been engaged to marry quite a few times.

Mary Catherine was about twenty years younger than Duffey, so she was about forty or fifty, depending on whether Duffey was about sixty or seventy by now. Duffey was looking much younger now though, younger than he had looked twenty years before. The Patriarchs have these peculiar tides in them that ebb and flow.

Mary Catherine stayed around town for a couple of weeks. She had leisure, as much as she wished to take. She had been a hard-working business girl for many years and had made good money. Then she had gone to work for Hilary Hilton and had made fantastic money. Now she was on leave.

She spent quite a bit of time wandering around the town. She spent a lot of time talking to Duffey. For some reason, Mary Catherine seemed entangled in his future, more so than the Countess Margaret, or Lily, or Charlotte, more so than the New Orleans ladies.

But the clotted future sometimes seems to be coming out of its jug not at all. And then, it comes out with resounding glugs, all mixed, and not as it was supposed to be. Well, whether she went back to Chicago only briefly, or whether

she went back there permanently, Mary Catherine went back then.

“Any more blowing in from the North, Mary Virginia?” Margaret Stone had asked.

“No, I think that's all of them for right now,” Mary V. said.

So Margaret sang the bristly song to the halting of the flood of them:

“The harpies came from Illinois.
Hi! Ho!
They'd give a Gadarene a pause.
Hi! Ho!
They rend the Duff with loving claws.
They eat him up with eager jaws.
(They really have such pretty maws.)
Hi! Ho!
I'm telling it just like it waws.
There ought to be some penal laws.
Perhaps they all will die of yaws.
Hi! Ho! The gollie wol!”

Why had anybody ever taught Margaret Stone that Gadarene Swine Song? Yes, there was a little bit of action on the New Orleans front even.

Mary Virginia. Salvation Sally. Margaret Stone. Well, what about Mary V. and Salvation and Margaret? Oh, nothing, it was just that they were such pleasant and wonderful ladies. One would have to think of them intensely and often. And Patriarchs usually come to wifely harbors several times in their long lives.

What was this? Seven women, some of them less reluctant than others. Does that mean there is a pick of seven different futures?

You try to get this clotted future to come out of the jug, and it will not budge at all. And then maybe it will break loose with a cascade of stuff you never even guessed about.

Book Nine

"You, Melchisedech the odd-ski,
Stand not fearful like a clod-ski,
Follow Noah and Zabodski."

[Bascom Bagby. *Letters After I Am Dead.*]

Duffey came on a painted sign one morning. It read "The Future Begins Right Here. Follow the Arrows." But there were seven arrows pointing in seven different directions. And there was a landscape or townscape, very well done, painted beneath each arrow. Deeply mystified, Duffey examined the sign. It had a beautiful and dampish look to it, and he touched it.

"Oh, it's still wet. You got some on you. I'm sorry," said an adolescent girl. "I was supposed to watch, but I didn't notice you."

Then there were several nice girls there. They said that they had painted the sign for both an advertisement and a prop in a school play and had set it there to dry. They said that the sign was a sort of 'in'-play or 'in'-people reference and did not have any profound implications.

"I painted the scenes under the arrows," one of the girls said. "I'm a painter." These were very pretty girls and they attended Ursuline Academy.

But Duffey knew that they were wrong. He knew that the sign did have very profound implications. The future really did begin here, for him, for the world. Most of his life he had lived in the present, and now there would be no more present for him. The future, parting and branching off in the different directions, would be tricky.

"There is something obdurate and absolute about this sign of yours," Melchisedech told the girls. "It means either the end of myself in this mortal coil, or it means the end of time itself."

"Yes it does," one of the girls said. "That's what the play is all about. It's about this old man who comes to the end of his skein, and somehow the fate of the world is tied to his fate, or he believes that it is. Say, do you want to play the part of the old man? His name is Melchisedech. That's a name from the Bible. We've been wondering who would be good to play it."

"I will play it," said Melchisedech Duffey. "I am Melchisedech."

"You will be perfect," said a girl. "I am Therese Doucet the casting director."

"I have here a copy of the script that you may take," said another girl. "I am Cleo Mahoney the playwright. Do you suppose that you could learn your part within a week?"

"I can learn any part within thirty seconds," Melchisedech said and he took the script. He read it for more than thirty seconds, maybe for five minutes, and he seemed sometimes amused and sometimes terrified.

"Tbis is written with rare prophetic gift," he said. "It is prescient, it is almost omniscient. All right, I have it all learned. When is the performance?"

"Nobody could learn it that fast," Cleo said. "You are joshing us. Let us hear you give the great speech at the beginning of act three."

"All right," Melchisedech said, and he gave it in a fine ringing voice:

"I tell you that I'm sort of split in two.
My friend, Za-bot, Oh tell me what to do.
What, gone away and left me in my stew?
A sinkless craft is very well for you,
But I'm the man who cannot have an end,
So Scripture says, that will not break or bend.

And yet it's sure that I have lost my way,
And seven roads do beckon me this day.
How may I follow all? How may I stay?
I cannot have an end though time shall end.
Oh Kephos of the blooming nose on you,
Advise me where I ought to turn or trend.
You turn away and make a joke or two.
Oh hack me up in seven pieces, friend,
And seven roads I'll follow to their end,
But these are riddle roads that do extend
Beyond. Ah, welladay and welladoo."

People in the street had stopped to listen, and now some of them applauded. New Orleans people will applaud anything.

"This is about Melchisedech of the Old Testament," Cleo Mahoney explained then. "He is the one man who cannot have an ending. '*Sine Patre, neque Finem*', 'Without Father and without End', the Bible says about him. But what will happen to him when it is *time* for him to end, or when it is time for the world to end? That is the plot. I picture him hesitating before seven different roads, and then I give a sort of vision of each of those seven roads. Have you any talents? Can you do anything between the acts?"

"I can play my banjo," said Melchisedech.

"But would a banjo be fitting for a Patriarch?"

"Well, I could play my flute then. It is a medieval recorder-flute and it would not be at all out of the way for a Patriarch to play it. And I have been fooling around with Hebrew melodies lately. Hebrew melodies are 'in', as you must know."

"That will be wonderful," the girls said, "and you will be wonderful in the part. It is one week from tonight in our auditorium. We will keep you apprised of the details."

Knowing the play to be prescient of his own condition, Duffey went to see Kephos of the blooming nose. Kephos is stone, of course, which is Stein. And he explained the whole

situation, and the fortuitous little play that was an echo of that situation, to spacious Absalom Stein.

"I know about the play, of course," Stein said. "I've had to subscribe to twelve tickets to it. My daughter Rebeka is in it, you know. She goes to Ursuline. And what is a little Jew girl going there for? 'To get a more narrow education,' my wife said (it was her idea). Her education has been getting entirely too broad and I've been worried about that.' It is easy to say that an ultra-broad education never hurt anybody, but it has hurt me here and there, I believe. Oh, the play bites you to the quick, does it Melky? You do have a problem. The worst of your problems is that people who can never end may end by being tedious."

"You turn away and make a joke or two," the great speech in the play had said about this Kephos, and so it was.

Duffey went to see Zabotski who was likely the Za-bot in the play.

"Zabotski, I have a problem!" Duffey roared as he went into Zabotski's always open place. But his roar echoed back to him from the empty vastness of Zabotski's old quarters. Zabotski came there very infrequently now.

"Oh yes he lives in that unsinkable house on the lake," Duffey reminded himself. "Should I follow him there in his folly, as Bagby suggests in his latest letter?"

What had Zabotski been up to. Or what had Somebody been up to through him?

"Of all the good and illuminated persons who were in the world at that time, it was only to Zabotski that God spoke a particular message."

Probably the best account of the Zabotski Folly or the Zabotski Happening is to be found in '*House and Home Happenings Magazine*'.

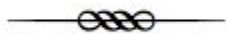
The following is an article in '*House and Home Happenings Magazine*'.

House and Home Happening has for a long time intended to do a piece on the fabulous and outrageous house of Zabotski (he says that his first name is none of our business) and his wife Waldo, which house is located on *Pristine Cove* of *Lake Borgne*. This house has been much talked about for its mysterious history, for the many children and strange animals that are there, for its great size and its flabbergasting design, for its ambient of rapidity ('top speed without hurry'), and for the graciousness of its host and hostess.

But several reporters who have gone on this assignment have failed to fulfill it properly. Even the pictures that they have brought back (of one six-hundredth of a second exposure and even faster) have been blurred on what were supposed to be still-lives, as though there were some sort of movement there that was too fast for the cameras. But that is nothing to the way the *reporters* themselves were blurred when they came back. One of them, gone for only three hours from the magazine office, grew a forty-seven inch long beard in the interval. His only explanation was that the time seemed like much more than three hours to him.

Stymied for a while, we have now decided to make this a two-part feature on the Zabotski house which is a house that has a 'myth of origin'. This 'myth of origin' falls into the context of what is called a 'shaggy people tale'. We have prevailed upon a sometimes associate of Zabotski, one Melchisedech Duffey, to put the rather slippery facts of origin into a sort of sequence. We publish it herewith, and we hope to have the actual description of the house in our next issue. We do not designate the Zabotski house, as we have designated so many others, as our '*House of the*

Month'. Rather we designate it as our '*House of the Uncertain Interval*'.



There were a few smart flies (this is Melchisedech Duffey writing) who knew it when the molasses they were caught in solidified into amber. But most of the flies, though they knew that something was wrong, didn't have any idea what was happening.

Zabotski went away and came back a lot. There is no doubt that we missed him during those intervals when he was gone. This account is about the time that he went away in an outlandish, giant contraption that he had built in his own backyard.

This was the time, continuing now apparently unbroken into the future, when Zabotski went to live in a large and ungainly house on Lake Borgne, when he lived there with his wife The Widow Waldo, and with many ungainly children and animals.

And before that, he had lived on Dumaine Street in a building between those of myself Melchisedech Duffey and that of Homer Hoose.

If we are to study origins, we will just study the origin of that huge house, and its movement from one location to another.



The '*Better Life League*' had recognized Zabotski to be an '*Entrance Person*'. But Zabotski hadn't recognized the '*Better Life League*' to be very much of anything. There were many of these non-mutual arrangements between Zabotski

and the exocosmos. The '*League*' was correct in his thought: Zabotski was an 'Entrance Person', a strong and peculiar one.

Zabotski was a quarrelsome man of the 'Who, me?' variety. He simply refused to believe some of the stories that he heard about himself as a starter of quarrels.

"I know better," he'd say. "I'm not like that at all. I am gentleness incognate. Anyone who says that I am quarrelsome had ought to be stomped into a slough and left to drown in his own lies. I wouldn't hurt a fly, surely not a fly caught in molasses. There is no way that I could demean or harm any other being, or even think of harming one."

So then, Zabotski was *not* a quarrelsome man. But he got on peoples' nerves for his constant swift pace in everything, but sometimes he was gone for a day or two and gave people a rest from him. At such times, he said that he went to the *Pristine World* to attend to his affairs there.

And yet his neighbors, by total consensus, found him quarrelsome and offensive. Could every one those neighbors be absolutely mistaken on a matter of fact like that?

Yes, they could be and they were. Those neighbors could all be mistaken about almost everything. Possibly the people in your own neighborhood could not all be mistaken on so many things, but those in Zabotski's neighborhood could be.

So there had seemed to be a quarrel, or at least a skirr of sharp words, between Zabotski and his neighbor Bryan Blackstone who lived on the other side of Homer Hoose, properly two doors from Zabotski; but due to the natural curvature of that block, the properties of Zabotski and Blackstone abutted in back.

"Do not raise the edge of your immortal voice against me, Bryan," Zabotski had warned during one of those lulls in what seemed to be a quarrel, "I'll build whatever I want to build. But you are mortal, as is your edged voice; and you will wither and die. The wither will be apparent on you tomorrow and you will be dead within five days." Zabotski

was a heavy kidder and this was all kidding, but Blackstone had never understood him.

"Oh Witch-Doctor Zabotski, I defy you," Bryan had exploded. "You cannot cause my death. I'm stronger than you are."

"Why should anyone call me a Witch-Doctor?" Zabotski asked in puzzlement, "And whyever or however should I cause a death? It is *time* that will eat you up and cause your death, Bryan."

"Not in five days it won't," Blackstone barked. "I will live to tromp on your grave, Zabotski. " And Blackstone tromped into his house.

"I wonder why all my neighbors are so touchy," Zabotski mused out loud. "In the *Pristine World*, they are free and easy and not touchy at all."

Blackstone stuck his head out of his door again.

"And get rid of that monstrosity you're building," he howled, "or I'll have the law on you."

"I'll build whatever I want to build on my own place," Zabotski maintained. "And if it does intrude a few meters onto the lots of my neighbors, why that is all fair give and take."



"Do you fancy yourself a Christ, Zabotski?" myself Melchisedech Duffey asked this sometimes associate of mine in exasperation. "Do you believe that you can curse that man-tree of a Bryan Blackstone and that he will wither and die within five days? Blackstone is no fig tree, and you are no Christ."

"Blackstone is more like the American Fig, the Sycamore Tree," Zabotski said. "It's a tall and mottled tree, but it has grubby and trashy fruit. Ah, I'll just send that sycamore tree

of Blackstone's ahead of him to wait for his arrival. When he comes to the blessed shore, he will be bewildered if there is not something grubby and trashy to greet him. He will believe that he came unforgiven into an alien place if there is not some second-rate thing there that he can relate to. *Mottled Tree, wither and die! By tomorrow let the life be gone out of you and you hang dead on your own branches!"*

It may be that the sycamore tree wilted in that very instant. One couldn't see it do it though.

"Do you really believe that you can command a tree and that it will die?" I, Melchisedech Duffey asked him. "And do you really believe that you can command a man to die and he will die?"

"Of course I can command a tree to die and it will die," Zabotski said. "The meanest man is lord over the tallest tree. This lordship is given to all of us, but not all know how to exercise it. And of course I can *not* command a man to die. That would be against nature itself and also against my own nature. And even if it were possible for me to *command* a man to die, that would be of no effect. Duffey, you ask silly questions sometimes."

"We will see whether the Sycamore tree is dead tomorrow," I said.

"What could there be to see?" Zabotski asked. "Of course it will be dead, and possibly it will have disappeared."

"Whatever it is that you're building, Zabotski, it's an eyesore so far," I told him. "And it does intrude onto other peoples' land."

"Ah, not too much," Zabotski said. "Blackstone is the only one who gets really mad about it. Homer Hoose hasn't looked out of his back window for a long time and he doesn't even know that my contraption is being built there. You surely don't care that it intrudes over your land, do? And the people at the '*Golden Children's Home and Haven Orphanage*' behind me there don't care about it. The youngest of those people like it. They like to play in it."

A grubby and trashy fruit of Bryan Blackstone sidled up to Zabotski and to myself Melchisedech Duffey. It was Bryan's little son Baxter. He was nicknamed 'Bandicoot' by the other little boys in the block.

"Please don't kill my father, Mr. Zabotski," little Bandicoot Blackstone begged. "He doesn't mean to be a blow-top any more than you mean to be one. But he is good to us at home and we can't get along without him. Maybe I won't even get to start to school next year if you kill my father. Maybe I'll have to go to work in the mines."

"Why, Bandicoot," Zabotski said, "there is no way that I could ever kill your father or any other person. I simply am not made that way. And they don't hire five year old boys to work in the mines nowadays."

"Then we'll starve," Bandicoot moaned. "But you said that the wither would be on my father by tomorrow and that he would be dead within five days."

"Yes, that's true enough, Bandicoot. Then you'll be the man of the family. That should be a proud and happy time for you."

"Please don't kill my father, Mr. Zabotski," Bandicoot begged again. Then he went away crying.

"I wonder why that little boy is crying?" Zabotski asked in real puzzlement. Zabotski is a little bit insensate sometimes.



This Zabotski was an odd one in that he sometimes went away for a day or two. No, that's not the way to explain his tricky case. Sometimes he went away for a year or more, but he was always back in a day or two. There, that is the best way the case can be put into words. I have private knowledge on this case, but I cannot explain it more fully than that.

Zabotski believed that, just as the great stars bend the light that shines past them, so he bent the Time that flowed past him. He had no doubt that he was a great star among men. Zabotski and his associate myself Melchisedech Duffey studied the problem of Time a lot, though I discounted the influence that Zabotski might have on objective time.

"Looking back on it, we see all history through a distorting medium," I said to Zabotski that evening as we worked on a sort of project that we had been busy on. "Someone has placed this opaque and hampering medium as an impediment about us so that seeing we might not understand and hearing we might not hear. It is as if we see everything through a most mysterious time-speed-distortion medium, and as if we ourselves were immersed in that medium. Really, there should be some way of analyzing that substance that we are imbedded in. What is it?"

"It's molasses," Zabotski said.

"Our past is all so close to us, and it all seems so artificially very far away," I continued. "I can reach out and grasp a firm hand and find that it is only slightly more hairy than my own. But I lift up my eyes and see that it is a million years away. Are my hand and my mind mistaken, or are my eyes and the evidence mistaken? What is that rock-drawing that you have there Zabotski, and what is the writing on it?"

"Your eyes and the evidence are mistaken, Duffey," Zabotski stated. "This rock-drawing and its writing may be the oldest '*how-to-build-it*' instruction booklet in the world. This is the clearest copy I've ever had of it, and I've been able to obtain several. I believe that it is the instruction booklet on how to build either a big barn or a big castle. In any case, there will be something very special and ordained about it. Well, I will have to build it to see what it is supposed to be. There's no other way. It's the same thing that I've been working on in my back yard for some time. I believe that the language of the instruction booklet is Hazh-Khazh."

"But Hazh-Khazh has never been deciphered, Zabotski," I reminded him.

"I know, that's what slows me down. I have to decipher it as I go along. It sure is going to be a big contraption when I get it finished."

"Have you considered that you may have the scale wrong and that you may be building it either ten times or a hundred times too large in every dimension?" I asked him.

"Sure I've considered that," he said. "But I've already started on this scale and I can't very well be mixing scales. There is nothing that says that a model must be smaller than the thing it represents. Mine may be a hundred times bigger in every measurement."

(Editor's Note: This might seem like strange and rambling stuff to appear in *'House and Home Happening Magazine'* which is mostly a pop-architectural publication. But there is not any other way to obtain the history of this most interesting structure, the Zabotsky House. Back to Melchisedech Duffey.)

Zabotski and I got along pretty well. And Zabotski disappeared at frequent intervals, and thus he did not become really unbearable.

"In all things we have been going forward rapidly and still more rapidly," I said to Zabotski once as I studied his charts and schematics. "I know in my heart and in my intuition that we have covered a very great distance in a very short time. But when I look back, I see that I am deceived either at first or at last. I see that we have been moving at such a very slow pace that yesterday is a million years ago. It's as if the whole continuum was made out of—"

"It's molasses," said Zabotski. "It's all made out of molasses."

I pored over various charts and projections and schemata as the sun went down and the stars came out at their observatory window. And Zabotski was building a model of a model of something out of sycamore wood. He did not know

yet what it would be that he was building. He measured and calculated and sawed and whittled and fitted and assembled. This model of a model, as described in the old stone pictures and writings, had begun to take shape both here indoors in small and outdoors in large. But the meaning and purpose and name of the construction had not yet leapt out at Zabotski, nor at myself.

"Molasses is a lot like amber," Zabotski said. "It flows so slowly that sometimes it seems to be solid. Creatures can be imprisoned in it and apparently be held motionless in it. They must deceive themselves as to their own time scale, for if they do not deceive themselves they will be dead. The name of the thing that is bothering you is the *fly-in-the-amber*, Melchisedech. But it has been determined that amber does flow very, very slowly. And I believe that anything imprisoned in it lives very slowly also, but still lives."

"Yes, the *fly-in-the-amber*, and also the *unfilled-bathtub-paradox*, Zabotski," I said. "I calculate that if the water has been running at the rate it is supposed to be running, and for the time that it is supposed to have been running, then the bathtub should have been filled sixteen thousand times. But it hasn't been filled even once. The bottom of the tub has just barely been covered now. Things can *not* have been going on at the orthodox pace for the orthodox time."

"No, they have been going on at a much faster pace," Zabotski said, "but they have been going on for hardly any time at all. Literally it all began yesterday, late yesterday."

"Tomorrow, as you know, we are to be visited by a group of *fundamentalers*," I told him. "I wonder how those ancient fossils of people have survived for so long. What an ignoble senility they show!"

"But no, they aren't old, Duffey," Zabotski said. "They are always the youngest people in the world. They are younger than we are. No, that's wrong. They are not younger than I am. But they are younger than you and the rest of the

people are, even if they have hold of the right idea backwards. Try this on your intuitions, Duffey: the *Fundamentalers* are not flies in molasses or amber as you are; they are flies in free air. Believe that they should be swatted like flies if you wish, but recognize that they move in the free air and you do not. I grant you that they are tedious people, but we must admit that they are half correct in their ideas. Fair's fair."

"You are saying that the *Fundamentalers* may be correct on their time scale, Zabotski? You are a curly-tongued needler, friend."

"That too, Duffey. But yes, of course they are correct in their time scale, when it is adjusted to the concept of the *Pristine World*. Ah, here is my life and my love, the Widow Waldo! Fly with me to a better place, Widow Waldo!"

"I had a letter and a call from the State Inspector of Eleemosynary Institutions today," the Widow Waldo said. "You have got to get that big shack of yours off of the grounds of the '*Golden Childrens Home and Haven Orphanage*'. Maybe the state can't make you remove the part that is on your own lot. So far, they are leaving that to the pressure or the indignation of your neighbors and fellow citizens, and that pressure is rising. But you have got to get rid of that part that intrudes on the *Orphanage* grounds."

"Don't give it another thought Widow Waldo," Zabotski said cheerfully. "It will not be taken care of."

"You are saying that it will *not* be taken care of?"

"It will *not* be, Widow: it will not be removed until it is completed, whatever it is and whenever that will be. So don't give it another thought. Fly with me to a better place, Widow Waldo."

"I told you that I would not go unless some of the children go also," the Widow said. She was stuck on Zabotski in spite of him being an ugly and loud-mouthed old man.

"Six of them then," Zabotski said. "That's how many went in the suggested scenario that accompanied the *how-to-*

build-it kit. And they were somewhat older than yours; they were three married couples. There is something messy about whole bunches of small children on a water trip all cooped up."

"Messy or not, there will be whole bunches of them," the Widow Waldo insisted. "You haven't understood all the prototypes of your contraption. Sure it's a ship, sure it's a castle, sure it's an anti-time machine. But it's also a shoe."

"You mean like the one the old woman lived in?"

"Yes, Zabotski, yes," the Widow Waldo said. "You catch on slow."

"W.W., what are all those funny looking animals I've been seeing on the orphanage grounds today?" I, Melchisedech Duffey asked her.

"Oh, they're just green-clay animals, but some of them are a little too much in a hurry. The children got them ready a way early, but a lot of them fall apart after they run around for a little while. They're starting to assemble better ones now though." Widow Waldo cooked us supper sometimes when we worked at night on the plans and the constructions. Widow Waldo had once been a famous beauty. She had even been Miss America. Then she had married, really it was a sort of stunt that the promoters dreamed up, Waldo Waldorf who was Mr. Body Beautiful of the West North Central States, including Illinois. But this husband Waldo was killed by a jealous rival. After that, Widow Waldo devoted herself to the service of orphans. She was still beautiful, but her beauty was now more subdued than it had been several decades ago when she was Miss America.



Well, it's next morning. And there's something that we can

check out. Is the sycamore tree dead? Zabotski had said "Mottled tree, wither and die! By tomorrow the life will be gone out of you and you will hang dead on your own branches." Well, had it happened or not? It should be easy enough to tell whether the sycamore tree was dead or not. What was the difficulty?

The difficulty was that the sycamore tree wasn't there.

"Bandicoot!" I, Melchisedech Duffey called to that little Blackstone boy. "Didn't there used to be a sycamore tree right about there? What happened to it?"

"How did you happen to remember about that sycamore tree, Mr. Duffey?" Bandicoot Blackstone asked. "Yes, it died. And we cut it down so it wouldn't fall on someone. How did you remember it? That was a long time ago, when I was a little boy."

"Oh yes. And how is your father today, Bandicoot?"

"I think he feels seedy. He says he's got the withers. It's the middle age eating him up, he says."

"Oh yes. And where are you going now, Bandicoot?" I asked.

"Oh, to school."

"Ah then, you *are* starting to school."

"Yes, I'm starting to high school today," Bandicoot said. "It's almost as if the best part of my life were behind me."

Well, a few years had slipped by there. That happens to me sometimes, to Zabotski also. The morning sun cast a shadow of Zabotski's contraption. It was larger, much, much larger than it used to be. It was giant.

Some people from the '*Moral Sanctions Committee for the Removal of Eye-Sores and Abominations*' came up to Zabotski as he stood adoring the morning sun with his eyes and with his extended arms.

"Mr. Zabotski," said an embattled lady of that committee, "that eye-sore of yours is still there and you have built it even bigger. It is eight years since we reminded you that it

was an abomination, and you solemnly swore that you would do something about it on the morrow."

"No, ma'am," Zabotski said. "I solemnly swore that I would not do anything about it on the morrow. I believe that people misunderstand me because they do not listen to me closely. And it has now been eight years. It was only yesterday that you reminded me that it was an abomination. Do you not remember that it was only yesterday that we talked on this?"

This simple answer seemed to throw the *Moral Sanction Committee* into some sort of confusion. Yes, they did remember that it was only yesterday that they had talked to Zabotski about the distasteful subject. But they also remembered that it had been eight years. Could it have been both?

"Of course it could have been both," Zabotski assured them. "In the context of *Pristine History* it was only yesterday. In some trashier context that you may have been dabbling with it may have been eight years. I do wish that people would not indulge in such contexts as have become common. They waste time. They waste it a thousandfold."

"It is still an eye-sore and an abomination," one of the *Moral Sanction* men said. "What do you intend to do with the monstrosity?"

"Until I figure out what it is that I'm building, I simply haven't any idea what I will do with it," Zabotski said. "If it had wheels, I might roll it to *Pristine World*, but I can find no wheels on the plans."



"If *Pristine World* is so swift and so superior, why do you come back here every time?" I, Melchisedech asked my associate Zabotski.

"Ah, I believe that I'm imperfectly accelerated for *Pristine World* as yet," the Zab said. "I have to come back to catch

my breath. And sometimes I just come back to this stuck-in-molasses world to rest and to see my friends. I believe that, ever since I was a child, I have had this present dream of living on a grubby and slow-moving and molasses-filled world. Myself, I seem to fall between the two worlds. Old Molasses here is much more fascinating as a dream than as a reality though."

The *Fundamentalers* came about noon that day. Zabotski and myself Melchisedech Duffey met with them at a big table under the trees. It was not known why the *Fundamentalers* wanted to exchange views with Zabotski and myself. Both of us were students of history and paradox, that's true. And the *Fundamentalers* were avid about history. But there may not have been much resemblance between the several sorts of history that now came under discussion.

"Mr. Zabotski and Mr. Duffey," said a member of the Pattenite faction of the *Fundamentalers*, "we have here publications by both of you in the realm of history, but (slippery, slippery!) we are not sure that you are dealing straight in your history. Are you?"

"I never pretended to deal history 'straight' " Zabotski said. "I am an artist and a prophet before I am an historian. I believe that history is an involuted epicycloid and not a straight line at all. But I do deal with history as honestly as I am able to do it."

"And so do I, *Fundamentalers*," I, Melchisedech said. "But I am not so sure about yourselves. I believe that you often supply arbitrary answers when there are no real answers available."

"We would not have any answers if they were not given to us from above," the Pattenite man said. "I have here, Mr. Zabotski, a copy of your '*Pristine History of the World*'. I find that its chronology is almost identical with our own: the probably instantaneous creation of first life between 20,000 and 10,000 BC; the 'sixth-day' creation of land, animals and

man between 10,000 and 2,800 B.C.; the Floodtide Catastrophes, the instantaneous rising of the Alpine-Himalayan System, and the flotation of Noah's barge (which you do not quite call by that name) all about 2,800 BC; the re-population of the planet and the development of new zoological variations from 2,800 to 1,450 BC; then the times of the Ancient Empires, of Exodus, and then the Redemption followed by the Diaspora, of Rome's Fall and of the Medieval Period, of the Modern and Western Interludes, right up to our present year of 2,000 AD."

"Why not up to our present year of 200,000 AD?" Zabotski asked. "I believe that is as likely a number for our present time as is 2,000 AD. The multitudinous happenings, they have been happening quite a lot lately. Yes, there is some agreement between our chronologies, but it is probably accidental."

"There are no accidents," said a *Fundamentaler* of the Hatch school. "All is foreordained."

"I believe that nothing is foreordained," Zabotski said, "but I believe that accidents are the closest of all phenomena to being preordained."

"Widow Waldo, why are you hanging lace curtains in my contraption?" Zabotski called this latter question loudly and across a good space to his monstrous and unnamed and unmanned and unfinished contraption.

"Because it needs them, that's why," Widow Waldo called back. "It's drab otherwise. Lace curtains are always meshes of sunshine, until they become very dirty."

"But my contraption hasn't any windows, so far anyhow," Zabotski called. "And I'm not even sure it's the type of construction that could have windows. Widow, it isn't a house. It's a machine of some kind."

"It will have lace curtains whether it has any windows or not," the Widow answered. "I will paint windows on the inside walls if it comes to that. I like things nice and homey."

“My good people, this is the way it is:” Zabotski spoke again to the *Fundamentalers*. “I have written my *Pristine History of the World* to fill a gap. I travel much in the *Pristine World*, and I know it a little bit. I may even have come from there originally. I'm a little bit vague on my own origin. There are no duplications in the *Pristine World*, and there are no non-valid persons or situations. So I eliminated all duplicated or non-valid persons or situations from my thinking and from my history, and by that trick, I came up with my *Pristine History*. This makes it very much shorter than conventional histories which do sometimes list duplicate and non-valid things. The two worlds, the *Pristine World*, and the *Everyday-or-Molasses World* occupy the same space, but they do not occupy it in the same way. It is consequently difficult to explain one of them to the other.

“For analogy, let us consider a football game which generally uses three hours of clock time to cover one hour of whistle time. Let us take the films of that one hour of whistle time and select the time (about twelve minutes) when the ball is actually in play. Let us then omit the time when nothing much is happening even though the ball is in play, and let us also omit a few worthless and completely repetitious plays. We can then get it down to about three minutes of hectic action. Please note that this would not merely be the highlights of the game; it could be the complete essence of the game. Well, the *Pristine World* is like that: it is the real and essential world. It does exist. Nothing is left out of it except the duplicated and the non-valid but very much is added to it. The *Pristine World*, in fact, is so intuitively imbued and indwelt that I can live overflowing years of it in the same space that is taken up by a day or two in the Molasses World. The *Pristine World* can travel in a thousand years where it took the *Molasses World* a million. We have got to throw in our lot with that faster and more valid world.

"That the chronology of the *Pristine World* somewhat resembles your own chronologies is no more than a humble coincidence. Possibly we do have the same time scale, but we do not arrive at it by the same way."

"We don't know how you arrived at it," said one of the *Fundamentalers* of the Rev. Patrick O'Connell following. "We came in through the front door."

"And I came in through the walls," Zabotski said.

The Widow Waldo carried loaded pots and hampers over and served good dinners to the *Fundamentalers* and to Zabotski and to myself Melchisedech.

"No, no, it's no trouble at all," she protested to the protesting *Fundamentalers*. "There is plenty of everything, All I have to do is take it out of the mouths of the poor orphans. We have so many poor orphans that there is almost no limit to the amount of food that I can take out of their mouths."

(The golden roof of the '*Golden Childrens Home and Haven Orphanage*' gleamed in the sun. It had been built and endowed several decades before by a bloated plutocrat named Harry Goldchild.)

"Do you believe that the true ark is still to be found in the high mountains of Armenia, half buried in the snow and ice, and guarded by angels?" A Cummings-clan member of the *Fundamentalers* asked Zabotski and myself Melchisedech Duffey. "To us, this is a test of faith."

"So that's what those things are!" Zabotski explained. "I've gazed at the things without even being able to guess what they are. Yes, now that you turn my mind to consider the subject, I believe that the ark is to be found there in the original and in at least twenty copies. It must have been the most popular build-it-yourself kit of that era. And yes, of course I believe that it is guarded by angels. When things get too inaccessible to be guarded by humans any longer, then angelic guards always take over. Yes, it is there, in High

Armenia, but we don't know for sure where High Armenia is to be found."

"But of course we know," said the Cummings-clan member. "We have three expeditions there now."

"But of course you do *not* know where it is," Zabotski explained to them. "The divided country that is now known as Armenia, the mountain that is now known as Ararat, they were neither of them known by those names before the fourth century of our era. A king of that country then decided to call his country, which had been named *Haik*, by the biblical name of Armenia. *Armenia* merely means a mountainous place. Like Montana, which means exactly the same thing, the name was then applied to a definite area: but it was not so originally. And that king decided to call the mountain which had been named *Aghri Dagh* by the biblical name of *Ararat* (which means simply 'Mountain'. But there is nothing to indicate that the king was making correct identification. Or that he was not making them. Likely, he was merely trying to establish a bright history for his poor mountain country."

"We know these things," said the Cummings-clan member, "but there is something to indicate that he was making correct identifications. The Hand of God stood in the sky above him and a large assembly of the King's followers and pointed down on the mountain and land to identify them. This is to be found in the King's own words."

"By your own chronology mountains weren't *there* before the flood," Zabotski said. "They would have to have risen up under the ark. I have evidence that this is exactly what did happen."

"As to the Ark or arks that have been sticking out of the snow on some of the peaks of this Ararat," said myself Melchisedech, "they are remnants of great wooden structures, but it is unlikely that they were water-craft of any kind. I believe that they were great wooden castles. There is a genuine tradition of a dozen or more great wooden castles

existing on those crags before the cyclic climate turned colder and buried them in quasi-perpetual snow.”

“And would angels be guarding old wooden castles that were not the Ark?” a person asked.

“Yes they would,” Zabotski stated. “When anything becomes remote from the eyes of men, then angels take over. I don't know why there was ever any confusion on that point.”

“Mr. Zabotski,” asked a Hatch follower of the Fundamentalers, “what did you mean a while ago when you said ‘Why not up to the present year of 200,000 AD?’ Was that a joke?”

“It was a riddle, which is a form of a joke, yes. Why do you say that this is 2,000 AD? Why not say that it is 1,000 AD? By any count, we very plainly do not know where we are right now. This might very well be 500 AD or 600 AD. We haven't clear evidence for a larger number of valid years than that. I think of one possible exclusion, one period of one thousand years that might have been written into history by a young boy in the year 1348, at the depth of the ‘Black Death’ plague. About the only people left alive then were children and very young people, and some of them continued the chronicles. There is an even chance that the whole notion of a thousand-year-long ‘dark ages’ was no more than the delirious dream of a vivid boy in that dismal crisis time of sickness. There isn't any very strong independent evidence of any such period of ‘dark ages’.

“You find it strange that a young and sick boy might have been writing our history then. Tell me, can you find out who is writing our history now?”

“Mr. Zabotski,” one of them said, “there are dark rumors that you sometimes go away for two or five or a dozen or even more years at one time. Do you?”

“Yes I do, friend,” Zabotski said. “What is amiss with that? Many persons travel for various lengths of time.”

“And there are further dark rumors that you always come back from your years-long journeys in a day or two or possibly three. Do you?”

“Yes I do, friend. What is wrong that? Many persons return again and again to a place that is familiar to them.”

“And you are really gone such a number of years? And you are really back in such a number of days? And you do not find anything strange about that?”

“Oh but I do!” Zabotski howled. “I find it all strange and wonderful! I wouldn't trade places with anyone in this respect. Hardly anyone else has this sort of mobility.”

“Mr. Duffey,” another Pattenite said to me, “you in your own works sometimes seem to doubt part of the evidence that has been dragged out of the Olduvai Gorge of Africa, evidence that puts human existence into terms of millions of years. You seem to doubt some of this evidence a little bit. But you don't doubt it nearly enough.”

“How do *you* doubt it? What is enough?” I, Melchisedech asked him.

“Have you not noticed that all the evidence for the extreme antiquity of man has been taken from one long rift fault in the earth, and most of it from that tumbled portion of the fault named the Olduvai Gorge of Africa?”

“I have noticed this, yes,” I said.

“Do you not know that the sequence of strata is nullified by a rift fault? Do you not know that the whole idea of *in situ* evidence is meaningless in such a formation where the *situs*, the location, is jumbled?”

“That is a little bit extreme, but not much?” I said.

“And have you not noticed that all the significant ‘discoveries’ have been made by persons of just four families, the Brooms, the Darts, the Oakleys, and the Leakys, a benighted and ingrown feudal group? Have you not

noticed that they are all vouched for by each other, but not really by anyone else ever?"

"From my childhood I have noticed all this, yes," I said.

"Do you not know that all South African science is justly held in contempt by all thinking persons as being trivial and provincial and inept?"

"Sure, except—"

"Except in this one case," the Pattenite pursued, "the 'evidence' for the extreme antiquity of man. And all of this 'evidence' is found where normal evidence will not apply, and all of it is found by a group of mind-already-made-up duffers. This 'evidence' is used by the infidelity crowd to prove what they want to be proved. But they do know better than to put that 'evidence' to a test. It is too distant for them to test, they excuse. But it is really 'behind God's back' stuff. It is 'bottom of the world' stuff."

"We call it 'behind the barn' evidence," I, Melchisedech told him, "and we know that it is grotesque. These things are giddy frauds. Nevertheless, there is, in other places and discovered by other people, fairly reasonable evidence for an antiquity of man beyond what you will allow, though far short of the African-Extravaganza claims. Actually the African Extravaganza is a sort of pop-rock hymn (rock hymn, fossil rock, get it?) sung to the real antiquity of man. Hymns are not expected to contain accurate evidence."

"Of the many great wooden structures sticking out of the Ararat snow, one is valid," an Ark-advocate said. "Some of us have been inside the structure."

"So have I," Zabotski said, "but I didn't tumble to what I was inside when I was there."

"Things have been brought back out of that Ark to prove its authenticity," the Ark-advocate said.

"I know it," said Zabotski. "I brought *this* back from there." It was the rock drawings and writings that Zabotski had been using as a guide to building his own contraption.

"What is it, Mr. Zabotski?" one of the *Fundamentalers* asked.

"Oh, it's the instruction and maintenance manual," Zabotski said. "Every vehicle of every sort comes with an instruction manual. I took this one from your Ark."

"But you two are not with us in our teachings and beliefs," one of the *Fundamentalers* said after a while. "Whoever is not with us is against us."

"And whoever gathereth not with us splatterith," Zabotski said. The *Fundamentalers* left Zabotski and myself Melchisedech then.

"I don't know whether anything at all is to be gotten from them?" I doubted.

"Sure it is," Zabotski said. "I learned what it was that I was building. That's something that I learned from them. Duffey, you need a change to a faster pace and a look at real reality. Go to *Pristine World*. I will show you how to go. I will give you letters of introduction to it. You can go there for three or five years, and you can be back in two days. You're a scabby-necked chicken if you don't go."

"All right, I'll go," I said. I went to the *Pristine World* for three or five years. And I was back in two days.

The night before my return, the Orthodoxers burned a 'Clear Bright Flame of Science' on that tiny little front lawn of Zabotski. When the Orthodoxers burn a 'Flame', one can almost expect anything from a routine horse-whipping or tar-and-feathering to a genuine hanging and drawing and quartering.



Some of the children from the *Golden Childrens Home and Haven Orphanage* were carrying clumsily-made green clay

animals into the Zabotski contraption when I, Melchisedch got back. The animals were kicking and moving weakly.

"If you would bake the green clay animals, it would toughen them and make them hold together better," I, Melchisedech called to them. "You're losing the legs and heads off half of them while you carry them."

"It would kill them to bake them," one of the children called back to me. "What's the matter with you anyhow?"

"Are they alive now?" I asked.

"They're green clay now," the children said. "We get them out of green clay eggs. And they can be breathed into. Whoever heard of breathing anything into a baked clay animal? What's the matter with you anyhow?"

After that, things happened rapidly, almost as rapidly as they do in the *Pristine World*.

"Fly with me to a better place, Widow Waldo!" Zabotski called as he often did.

"What do you think I'm fixing to do?" she asked. "I suppose we will be ready whenever you are."

"Dammit, Zabotski, are you finished with your part yet?" Widow Waldo called.

"All except bolting the boat whistle onto the boat and getting myself a pair of water goggles."

"I'll bolt the whistle on. And I'll get the goggles for you," the Widow Waldo said.

There had been a rhapsody of animals the night before Zabotski and the Widow Waldo (she was now Wife Waldo Zabotski, but Zab still called her Widow Waldo), and quite a few of the children, and an amazement (that is the only collective word that will do for it) of animals, left in the giant contraption.

Green clay animals you say they were? Do green clay animals hoot and bellow like that? But I suppose that all of them were green clay animals up to the time of their hatching: Oh, the rhapsodic noises of many animals, roaring, runting, nikkering, neighing, whinneying, snorting,

whickering, trumpeting, blaring, bawling, yowling, barking, growling, yapping, rumbling, bleating, lowing, gibbering, hissing, giggling, yammering, mewling, caterwauling, crunching, gnawing, wheening, oinking, hammering, squealing, tumping, hooting, stomping, baying, bugling, shouting, yodeling, gruffing, snorting, and making a noise 'chok-chok-chok-kachoom'. There had been a great orchestration of animal noises, and of animal aromas also. But now, in the new daylight, the animals had settled down, except for a few still loading on. The contraption had the air of being animal-full and just about kid-full.



"We have a list of incredible charges against you, Zabotski," one of the *Orthodoxers* was saying as a bunch of them came up to Zab with dangerous faces and dangerous-looking weapons. "It is said that you refuse to accept the *Orthodoxer* time scale. It is said that you have been in the company of *Fundamentalers*, and that you have listened to fun being poked at the four greatest names in paleontology." The man making these serious charges wore a badge that said 'Darwin or Death'.

"I'd hardly do that," Zabotski said. "I'm pretty touchy, and my own name would surely head the list of the four greatest. I don't like fun being poked at me."

"It is said that you have substituted false history for the established thing," another of them attacked. He wore a badge that read 'Herbert Spencer Forever'. "It is also said that you 'leave' this place every now and then by mysterious conveyance, that you take off down the road, and that you just disappear. We would like to see you do that. Take off down the street now if you wish. I bet I can put a rifle bullet into your head before you can do your

disappearing trick. If not, nothing much lost. If you come back again, we'll grab you again. "

"Mr. Zabotski," said a reasoning member of the *Vigilante Orthodoxers*, "you don't really believe that the *Orthodoxer* account of origins is rot, do you? You are reported as saying that it is."

"Sure it is," Zabotski still maintained. "Almost everything about the *Orthodoxers* is rot. They average out lower than the *Fundamentalers*."

"You fink, you Fortean, you *Fundamentaler*," barked one of those guardians of pure science. He wore a badge that said "Huxley the Bulldog forever!" "Start walking! Yah, walk about three steps and we'll start shooting."

Zabotski started walking, but he threw darkness or clouds upon the *Orthodoxers* so that they couldn't see him or anything else for a little while. He went to his giant contraption and climbed to the top of it.



"Zabotski, you fool, there won't be a flood like the original flood," I, Melchisedech called up to him. I was in a mixture of frustration and laughter at him.

"Melchisedech, you fool, this *will* be the original flood," Zabotski called down. "The others were only for practice. And those big structures on Ararat are all discarded models. Mine is the thing itself. This is the original. Don't you know that legends always precede the real happenings?"

"There's a cloudburst on the way," Bandicoot Blackstone hollered at us as he stuck his head out of his door. "Wow! What am I saying. It's not on the way. It's here! Look at that rain! Did you ever see it start so fast and so hard. All person in designated lower areas are supposed to go to higher

ground. This is a designated lower area. Where's Zabotski going, Melchisedech?"

"Oh, he's going away for a couple of thousand years this time."

"That means that he might not be back for a couple of months."

"What happens if the water *does* rise and carry you away in your contraption?" I, Melchisedech called up to Zabotski.

"I'll float, that's what will happen," Zab called down through the downpour. "It sure is good to know that you'll float."

Zabotski pulled the water goggles down over his eyes, and he jerked on the boat whistle chain to sound the hooter. The Widow Waldo and the boatful of children and animals cheered. The contraption was afloat and into the swift stream.

"Zabotski, you fool, it'll never go under the Shoal Street Viaduct," I cried to him suddenly. "It's too big to go under it."

"Under or over it, or through it we'll go," Zabotski yowled, and he hooted the boat whistle again. "We can travel on water or air or space."

Zabotski came to his lot on Lake Borgne, and he is still afloat there, drifting on a little kedge anchor. He says he'll be ready when the real flood is ready, and that he and his are unsinkable. I wish that I, Melchisedech were unsinkable. These sure are rainy days for all this week now, since he floated out of here.

(Editor's Note: That is the end of the 'myth of origin' part of the account of the fantastic Zabotski house. And that is the end of Melchisedech Duffey as far as *H and H H Magazine* is concerned. That is the end of the 'shaggy people tale'. In an upcoming issue we will have a clear description of this interesting and charming and unsinkable and gigantic house on the coast of Lake Borgne where it opens into the Gulf of Mexico. We will have an account of

the very many odd children and the many horribly strange animals that are there, and of the great size and flabbergasting design of the grotesque structure. We will have an account of the architecture that is at the same time primordial and futuristic. We will have an account of that incredible but gracious couple, Zabotski and Wife Waldo. We will have this if the rains let up a little bit and the barges can bring in paper again.)

"How many of the children are coming along?" Zabotski asked.

"As many as want to come, I suppose," the Widow said. There was still a lot of beauty in her even though it was several decades since she had been Miss America.

There was news that nineteen unarmed *Fundamentalers* had been killed in a shootout with *Orthodoxer* police. Such things were happening all the time.



"How is your father, Bandicoot?" Zabotski asked the president of the Bandicoot Enterprises Limited.

"Oh, he's dying," Bandicoot said. "He won't last the day. But he's had a long and full life. I always liked that fellow."

"Who has taken over his businesses?" Zabotski asked.

"I will remain as chairman of the various boards," Bandicoot said, "but my son John, as 'First Executive' will be pretty much running the shows."

"Five days, that's really all he lasted," Zabotski mumbled in wonder.

"Some of the green clay animals that the children are carrying into your contraption are pretty misshapen, Zabotski," I, Melchisedech said to him.

"Some of the animals presently in *Molasses World* are pretty misshapen too, Duffey," he said, "as if they were

made by kids. They are at least as bad as these that are going into my contraption. These will do well enough."



"Is it true that you have bought a lake frontage on *Pristine Cove* on Lake Borgne?" a newspaper reporter asked Zabotski.

"True enough," Zabotski said. "I got in on a 'First Introductory' offer that was only tendered to outstanding citizens. It cost a little more than I was led to believe though."

"And is it true that the mysterious giant contraption that you are building in your back yard is intended to be your palatial home on the lake?" the reporter asked further.

"How would I ever get it there?" Zabotski wondered.

"Is it true that you complained to the City Commission that it floods so badly here that a good rain would wash an ocean-going ship right down the channel in front of your house, the channel that is humorously called Dumaine Street?"

"That sounds about like something I might have said," Zabotski admitted. "The river is getting higher all the time, or the land lower. And it does rain more, in these last years, and months, and weeks, and days particularly."

"Well, will it do it?" the reporter persisted. "Will a good rain (there's a gusher supposed to be on the way) float your giant contraption and carry it all the way to Lake Borgne?"

"With a good rain, that's possible," Zabotski said. "And Lake Borgne is an open-mouthed lake. It goes right into the Gulf. But just where is the line of questioning leading?"

Book Ten

You, Melchisedech, replevin.
Be you either lump or leaven.
Choose a road from one to seven.
Melchisedech, Ukalegon.

[Cleo Mahoney. *Seven Roads*.]

Duffey had visited Zabotski and his wife Waldo several times in their great, floating boat palace (The Big Red Barn on Pristine Cove, as their watery neighbors called it.) After all, it was less than a dozen miles away from Duffey. But Duffey knew that he would not have time to build such a castled boat himself, nor should he share that great contraption on Pristine Cove with Zabotski and wife Waldo. They were already sharing it with very many children and animals. One patriarch to a castle was enough.

But it was consoling to know that a boatful of children would live into the imminent future, whether the rest of the world lived into it or not. Besides, Duffey already knew how he would die, and it wasn't by drowning.

Was the world really coming to its end? Probably it wasn't yet, but for Melchisedech Duffey it was. Duffey had already seen the end of time for himself. The symbol of it had been the seven-arrowed sign put there to dry by the girls from Ursuline Academy. But he wouldn't have needed the symbol to know that his ending was at hand. His ending, but he would not have any end. Scripture states so.

Well, he had seen the barrier blocking him off from a valid future in this world, and he had backed off from it. He could go into the future only on another trick, in the context of the Seven Lost Years. He could not go into the future on

the normal track. And the seven alternate futures that were offered him. Dammit, there was something suspect about every one of them.

"Is there anything at all I can do about this?" Duffey asked himself. "Of course there is. I can worry about it. That's what one is supposed to do with problems."

And it happened that others were worrying about Melchisedech Duffey's problem also.

"Melchisedech has come to the end of his stick. This probably will not be his death. He has already seen his own ashes as memento of it. This may be that much worse thing, his disintegration. And if he loses his integrity, what boots him other things? He seems to be coming apart, to be unraveling into several strands. But Melchisedech is the man who does not have an ending. That must be meant of him in a special case, since none of us really ends, which is to say that we are all immortal in soul. But Melchisedech is splitting and flaking off. He can not go down seven simultaneous roads without that. The riddle of the seven futures may be too much for him. If he were younger, he could take them all in succession, one by one. But now I think he's stuck. I'd help him and advise him if I knew how. Otherwise, all I can do is pray for him.

"What is this about Melchisedech being of a very great age, about all of us in our group being of a very great age. Some days, I believe that. Today I don't.

"Melchisedech Duffey is not the Melchisedech, though sometimes he believes that he is, and sometimes he lives and remembers episodes out of the life of the real Melchisedech. I believe that the case of it is that Melchisedech Duffey is merely in unusual accord with his patron saint Melchisedech the King of Salem, and so he shares some of the memories and experiences of that old king.

"Such is the case as I believe it today. But on many other days I believe that Melchisedech Duffey is indeed Melchisedech the King of Salem. "The Devil-Released-From-Prison, who has made something of a stir in esoteric circles for these last several decades, is not the Devil himself. He is only one of the minor devils, a goof devil. I believe that he is a sort of decoy. It will seem, by those who mistake this decoy for the Royal Black Duck, that this vile lout is a parrot-brained inanity and is no real danger. And then the Devil Himself, put out of notice and out of mind, pursues his murderous and quiet work in all its clandestine horror.

"Such is the case of it as I believe it today. But on many other days I believe that the Devil-Released-From-Prison is the Devil Himself, that the great danger from him lies in his sinister silliness and his incomparable oafishness, in the strongest of all finite powers running amok in resolute madness and dedicated destruction.

[Absalom Stein. *Notes in a Motley Notebook.*]

"Duffey has gone to the very edge of time, for him, and then he is somehow drawn back. But we are in the same time-context with him. Though this is not necessarily the edge of time for the rest of us, yet we continue in the same time-fabric with Melchisedech Duffey. Has he unwittingly drawn us back from the edge with himself? This last year or so does seem very familiar to me, as though I had been through it several times before. Salvation Sally says that she has the same feeling about it."

[Margaret Stone. *Lines Written in Margin of Perrone's Praelectiones Theologicae.*]

"I have this fancy that Melchisedech Duffey is of an older recension than the 'current human'. There is not any authority Scripture or Revelations for the idea that God made many false starts in his creation. But there are legends about it. There are legends of the nine discarded worlds that God made before he made this world, the tenth. He discarded the nine because of their unacceptable defects. How they must have been when this world is the one finally accepted!

"But who says that it is? It may likewise be discarded, and an eleventh or twelfth or thirteenth world may still follow it.

"The nine discarded worlds are still animate and populated. What anthologies of errors and busts, or outright errors and of less-than-perfections they must be! What paradoxes they must contain that will not quite jibe, what giant ideas and titanic jokes, what brilliant conceptions that failed their promises!

"Sometimes people from one of the nine worlds blunder into this world. There is always a monsterness about these people. They may be overflowing with flawed genius. I believe that one of these persons who has blundered into this world is Melchisedech Duffey. Sure he was a Boy King and a Boy Magician, but in another world, not in this one. Sure he is without father or mother. They didn't use them on his world. Sure he is without end. The continuity there was a circle, returning, returning, and never ending at all.

"Melchisedech, Melchisedech, what discarded zoo-world have you come from? You do know that the Melchisedech paradox is now on collision course with this world, don't you? Who will pick up your pieces? You will be shattered into pieces, you know. Who will log all your voyages? You will voyage on the seven different winds, you know. If you weren't so damned indomitable about it all, one could almost feel sorry for you."

[Mary Virginia Schaeffer. *Lines in Her Duffey Book.*]

There are so many ghosts in that part of New Orleans that they have their own coffee shop, a place that is open for just an hour before dawn and an hour after. The ghosts come there to swap ghost anecdotes and also to try to purge themselves from the absolute horror of their trade. They do this by talking out those horrors with their fellow spirits.

You can see them slipping along in the very early morning, down Ste. Ann Street and Dumaine Street and St. Philip Street and Ursulines Avenue, up along Decatur Street where the French Market will not serve ghosts, up Chartres and Bourbon, out of Frenchman Street and Elysian Field Avenue, ghosts who have just finished their night's haunting.

In the Ghost Bar there is a large painting, done by Count Finnegan (did he paint it before or after he became a ghost?) showing, well the plain *ghostliness* of these customers. This is done in ghost violets and ghost grays, and it is really a convincing and moving picture.

That is a lie. All of it is a lie except the part about the Count Finnegan picture of the gathering ghosts. It really does hang in the ghost bar. Let the truth about that place now be told:

In New Orleans there was a little coffee shop that was run by a man named Anthony Ghost whose father had come over from the Netherlands. This establishment was called 'The Ghost Coffee Shop'. Dock workers and seamen used to come in here in the morning, people out of the Quarter, people just wandering around, night people who were very like ghosts. School kids also used to come in there on their way to school. Some of the day students at Ursuline Academy used to go to early mass at the Cathedral instead of at their own chapel, and then come into the Ghost Coffee Shop for breakfast.

Among these, for several days now, had been Crissie Cristoforo the famous painter, Therese Doucet the famous casting director, and Cleo Mahoney the famous playwright. And sometimes Rebeka Stein, who did not go to mass (she was a Jew) joined them there. Melchisedech Duffey had been coming into the Ghost Coffee Shop for thirty years, so one morning he talked with the girls about the play '*Seven Roads*' that was to be presented the following evening at Ursulines Auditorium.

"The seven roads are really seven cruces of happenings, seven scenarios, or seven variant futures," Cleo Mahoney the playwright of '*Seven Roads*' was saying. "There is not enough room in the play to do other than to suggest them with short and trenchant flashes. Crissie Cristoforo, our great artist here, caught them superbly in that advertising sign 'The Future Begins Right Here', with its seven scenes, and the verses written athwart each of them. Unfortunately she used a water soluble paint, and the constant heavy rains this past week have almost destroyed it. Crissie is trying to reconstruct it in oils now, but it eludes her."

"I saw the original when it was still wet," Melchisedech reminded her.

"So you did," Cleo said. "Now the case is that the Patriarch Melchisedech cannot end, but neither can he continue on here in this world in the way that he has been doing. There are seven contingent futures waiting for him. Which ones he chooses, and the order he chooses them in, will be accidental. And I give you a million guesses as to what are the determinants to the futures he chooses."

"No, I cannot guess it, not in million guesses," Melchisedech said. "What are the determinants?"

"Pot holes," Cleo said, "potholes in the streets and the sidewalks. That caught you flat-footed, didn't it, Mr. Duffey? There are seven special potholes in the streets and sidewalks of this town. No two of them are in the same block or even in the same street. Each of them has a little valve or

activator or switch in it. The Patriarch Melchisedech will stumble or turn his ankle in one of the potholes. He will activate the valve or switch by that; and (in some cases, without even realizing the transition) he will be into one of the seven alternate scenes or futures."

"But what if I *don't* step in a pothole?" Duffey asked.

"If there's a pothole around, you'll step in it, Duff," Anthony Ghost the proprietor said.

"The fetish transformation activator, in dream context or in detached experience, is almost always a ridiculous and incongruous thing," Rebeka Stein said. "I believe that Cleo's unconscious is to be complimented for dredging up the potholes as symbols. They are just randy enough to be fitting. Watch where you're walking these days, Duff, or you might stumble into the wrong hole."

This Rebeka Stein had known Melchisedech Duffey for all the fifteen years of her life.

"I have trouble naming the seven variant scenarios," Cleo Mahoney said. "They are really seven aspects of another world, not of this one. But essentially they are these:

"*One.*" Perhaps this is best expressed by the verse that Crissie Cristofero here printed on the scene of that contingency:

'This is a case to crack your heart.
This is the day it falls apart.'

"It is a contingent world in which *everything* changes and is on the verge of collapsing. Rooms do not have walls, whisky does not have bottles, and people do not have skulls. There are no boundaries at all left in that world, no marks where one thing ends and another thing begins. It doesn't run together yet, but it is ready to do so at any time. The Damocles Sword, which now has no surface to separate its steel from the non-steel of its ambient, hangs directly over everything.

"Two." And this is expressed by Crissie's verse:

'Here is compassion hoked and hammed.
A K.C. swap is a swap bedamned.'

"We do not know what this verse means, or what a K.C. swap is, and neither does Crissie. The essence of this contingency is a very bad trade, the dealing away of something of very high value for something that is worthless. It is the compulsive trading off of the worthy for the unworthy, and it diminishes the world by every such swap that is made.

"Three." This is the Crissie verse to it:

"This is The Count who meets countdown.
And a dead man wears the triple crown.'

"A man is elected to a very high office. He says that he will not serve in it. 'I am dead, that's the reason that I won't serve,' he says. 'That is no reason at all,' a powerful voice answers him. So the dead man is ordered out of his crypt and put into action. Then it is a helter-skelter runaround combined with a spy story. It is really "The World as Spy Story'. But the high office is as high as the World, and the World must be drawn into the involvement.

"Four." The Crissie verse has this one this way:

"Here is the fleece, and the golden gloat.
The 'Endless' ends, and the world's a boat.' "

"I believe that Crissie Cristoforo is a sibyl or a pythoness," Rebeka Stein interrupted. "She comes up with these prophetic couplets. They're good, but she doesn't have any idea at all what they mean. Is there any market for good prophetesses these days, Duff?"

"There is always a market for good prophetesses," Melchisedech said.

"I believe that this is the 'Ongoing Quest Adventure'," Cleo Mahoney said. "The Quest succeeds, and then it becomes addictive. It succeeds again and again, and the high persons become avid for that continuing golden success. Oh, it strews goodness all along its route, but still there is something a little bit poisonous about success going on and on and on. A revenge must be taken against such successful questers. Some of them die then, or they are killed. That is at least part of the revenge. But they have such momentum that they don't realize or admit that they're dead. Even when they are shown their bones and ashes they don't believe it. They withdraw a bit into the past from that point, and they are alive again, but the problem is still unsolved. This is about a world and a high group in it who are driven to shining excellence, excellence, excellence, and a broken record of it."

"I say 'On with it and on with it,'" ' Rebeka interposed. "There can't be too much of it. It isn't a broken record at all."

"*Five*," said Cleo, "and the Crissie verse here is:

'A shattered world, and an end of fuss.
A new folk comes, and it isn't us.'

"The world is turned inside out, and the world and its people are seen to be made out of a grotesque stuffing, trash and old paper and pieces of wood. This stuffing is weighed in the scales and found wanting. 'Wait, wait!' someone calls 'you are only weighing the stuffing that leaked out of it. You're not weighing the thing itself.' 'What I have weighed, I have weighed,' the weigher says, 'and it weighs short'. Then the people are replaced by finer non-people. We don't like it, but we are no longer there, so it doesn't matter. There is a slaughter scene in this one somewhere.

"*Six*. It happens that the Patriarch and his adversary are the only persons left in the world. All of the other people are

held in abeyance somewhere. The Adversary presses the Patriarch to sign an agreement. They battle grotesquely somewhere, or maybe they Indian-wrestle.

“The Crissie verse has it like this:

‘This is the duel, and the bill of cost.
Oh sign it not, or it all is lost.’

“There is something very, very wrong about that covenant that the Adversary is pressing the Patriarch to sign. If it is accepted, then we are all undone. Undone literally, destroyed, unmade, negated, nullified forever.

“*Seven*. The Crissie verse gives this:

“The Melk is a bust, and a crown, and toff.
He had it all there, and he booted it off.’

“Everything is going right in this one, everything. In this one, we will all come into our glory, immeasurable and eternal. The people of the Golden Fleece have won for us, and we have won for ourselves with our own high qualities. There is not one chance of our missing the beatific vision. Well, yes, there is one chance of our missing, but it's one chance in a hundred billion. We'll play with odds like that all day. There is not a cloud in the holy blue sky. Not a cloud, but there is something else. It is a rowdy looking bird coming in on loutish wings. And the rowdy bird trails, in its beak, a pennant on which are the words ‘Whatever can go wrong will go wrong’. But it's only one chance in a hundred billion that we will miss. Then why do we suddenly go all clammy like this? That is the seventh and the last contingency.

“The only thing after this seventh scrappy vision and a short counter-ode by the chorus is your rousing curtain speech, Mr. Duffey. Oh, don't let it frustrate us! I hope it will be a success.”

“Or a successful frustration,” Melchisedech said.

"If Crissie only knew what her verses meant we would have an easier time of it," Rebeka Stein commented.

"Yes, it is like working with priceless but unset and odd-shaped stones," Cleo Mahoney complained. "It is a frustration. But the play itself is a study of frustrations. Oh, I hope it will be good."

The play was presented the following evening. It was pretty good.

3

Well, did you ever watch the way the future comes out of its jug? The jug is of smokey glass or rock crystal. Shapes and forms and movements can be seen in there, and some of the details of it can be guessed. But it is all distorted and deformed. It is the curvature of the smokey glass that deforms the images. No future is ever seen undeformed.

But the globes of the future trying to get out will push each other back, and there will be clotting at the mouth of the jug. Only thin juice will roll out for a while. Then it will break loose and big hunks will come out. But they are never quite as you imagined them to be when you peered through the smokey glass.

Can one cheat to catch an earlier look at what is coming out? One can try. There is a thin leading edge between the devouring present and the waiting future. What happens if one is too eager and crosses this leading edge? The world ends, for that person, for that while.

If this thin line is crossed, then one is out in the narrow interval of unreality. It's a chancey though flexible place there.

Melchisedech Duffey and his history had come up to the absolute present time, and then had gone a thumb's width beyond that, Duffey and his nimbus had gone into the future

then? No, they had gone into the shattering state of contingency. It was a fracturing of reality. And it was a fracturing of Melchisedech Duffey.

There has always been a quantity of unreality leaking out of the future into the present. Then the unreality has to be negated, and the reality revived. The reconstructing of reality is what is being talked about when we talk about reconstructing the world.

Duffey had been into the future before, spottily, off and on, for seven years once. And he had returned several times to those same seven years. And yet it was not strictly speaking into the future. It was a mixture of future and past and present. It was an interval or series of intervals removed out of time and held apart. The intervals of Seven Years did not necessarily count in regular time, which is why they could sometimes be revisited. They did not fracture reality. They stood on the far side of reality.

Melchisedech had been on the fourteenth voyage of the Ship Argo, and this fourteenth voyage was technically in the future. And his own ashes had been brought back to him from that future land. Anything brought back from the future has unreality as a major component. Anyone who ever looked at or handled Duffey's ashes with seeing eyes and sensing fingers knows something about their index of unreality. Teresa the Showboat knew about their unreality, but she believed that she was blowing them into real fire.

In a misbehaven case like this, when a complex over-runs itself, it is shattered into a number of apocalypses or possible manifesting futures. A number seven is often mentioned of these futures. Really, there is no limit to the number of contingencies: but seven of them, like eager olives of different sizes, seemed to be disputing the mouth of the jug. And the seven most jostling ones were these:

"One." This is called, from a remnant of it that has been found, '[The Great Day Contingency](#)'. It is characterized by a bewildering unstructuring or unstructuring of all things. It is

further characterized by the obliterating of boundaries, which results in the obliteration of persons also. The irony is that Duffey was the one who had first thought of this, and that as a joke. It would take a lot of misplaced faith on the part of a faithless world to bring it off, but misplaced faith is the easiest sort to come by. If you go imagining a trap like that one, you had better imagine yourself leaping out of its jaws pretty nimbly. Duffey hadn't done this, and he had been caught.

(This sounds a little bit familiar. Yes, the pretty girls who were putting on the play, and one of them was a prophesying pythoness who hit some of this imagery pretty close.)

'This is the clock that stopped at twelf.
This is the snake that swallowed itself.'

That was the theme of the Great Day Contingency. Wouldn't it be an absurd ending? Or even an absurd future segment? But one does not say 'Absurd' to a thing that swallows one up.

"Two." This is the [Goat Contingency](#). ('Whence do I have this partial understanding of the alternatives,' Duffey asked himself, 'my understanding of these alternatives offered to me and to the world? Oh, I simply have them in my prophetic function. Even the little verse-writing prophetess at the academy had pieces of this understanding.') This contingency was that of the Promontory Goats or the Scapegoats as passionate motivators of the world and as receivers of the world and as receivers of the world's bankruptcy. This contingency involved one of the Prodigious Persons or Splendid Animations, Casey Szymanski, as cosmos scapegoat and bad-trader of worlds. Nobody could ever make a bad trade like Casey. Compassionate goats keep picking up the tab for the deficitting world. Casey had tried to trade souls with the Devil to spare that person

punishment. Whether that trade was ever consummated, or whether it was still in the process of being consummated, is not known. Casey did trade souls (or perhaps it was just one of his old souls that he had lying around, as Absalom said) with Absalom Stein. Casey and his sort will trade off everything till there is nothing left to trade. And, when the debts of all the world fall due and must be collected, they must be collected from them the scapegoats. They will pay forever in a lower and more painful hell than the one commonly known, the fearful hell that is under the name-board "The End of Compassion'. This is a very doubtful contingency, but it does answer the question 'Who is going to pay for it all?' Like all the contingencies, it involved the entire world.

"Three." This is the eschatological resolution presented in the form of the [*Petrine Spy Story*](#). In plainer words — no, there are no plainer words to lend it. This is about a very special selection and fingering of a man for a great station. Spy stories are in, especially those on whose outcome the fate of the world hinges. Count Finnegan is the main person in this alternate. Finnegan's death on the Marianao Coast of Cuba near Havana was a trick (Oh, certainly he died there), a cover drama to spring him loose for a great masquerade. His appearance, whether in effigy or in body, was exactly the same as that of Peter the Second, banana nose and all. When forces move to kill Peter, there will be some very intricate movement and counter-movement. Dotty Yekouris (dead-undead on the Marianao Coast also) has an incredible role in this. God knows what!

Someone will be dead on the Petrine throne, and yet someone will still reign over that diminished and tottering and holy kingdom. The only thing preventing this chase-farce-tragic-drama from moving out of contingency and into certainty is that Finnegan cannot be found, dead or alive, to play his role. Or he is already playing that role, And this version of the world is already happening. Once more, the

whole world is involved in this alternative. But it's a pretty chancey thing to try to save the world on such a shoestringy thing as this is.

“Four.” This is the Fourteenth Voyage of the Ship *Argo*, and the Reduction of Melchisedech Duffey. It must happen (this is the only one of the contingencies that is sure to happen) but it will not preclude other alternatives from happening. This is in the pretertemporal circumstances of the Seven Lost Years (they are called the Seven Golden Years in their own context). This is concerned with ongoing beatitudes, and the strong promise of Final Beatitude. It is concerned with Shipboard Romance in a wider sense than it is usually understood. It is the ‘Quest Accomplished’ motif (and what will you do for an encore now?) The fleece has been found, and the big moment of that finding abides forever.

All of the Splendid Animations have sailed on the *Argo*, are sailing on it now even though they believe that they are doing other things in the flatland that is taken for the ordinary world, and they will still sail on it on the high seas after every shore has sunk.

The splintering contingencies are not, in all cases, exclusive things.

The last death of Melchisedech Duffey has to occur on this Fourteenth Voyage of the *Argo*, or his ashes could not be brought back from it.

We will return to this case again with more massive information.

“Five.” This is called the Thunder Colt Complex, or the Decatur Street Opera House Presentation of the World. Duffey had once been frightened to learn that the Decatur Street Opera House had moved into the realm of the possible to the extent of advertising in the *Bark*. The Presentation is an Ending and a Beginning, except that it is some other species and not ourselves that begins when we end. Were we members of this glorious new species, we

would applaud. Being of the old and unregenerate species, it will stick in our throats.

To this case also we will return with much more massive information.

“Six.” This is the confrontation of Melchisedech with the Loosed Devil in a closed place. There are instructions given before the confrontation. ‘You stand for Mankind in this meeting,’ someone tells Melchisedech as he goes to the doom place. ‘I will just be damned if I stand for Mankind, here or anywhere,’ Melchisedech swore. He never knew whether these unbodied voices were those of friend or enemy.

This was a duel that shook the whole spider web in which the suns are caught, the web that is called the cosmos. Or else it was not that at all. It was a fancy that Melchisedech might or might not accept in its possibilities.

A covenant is offered there, but there are holes in that covenant. But what if Melchisedech accepts the covenant, and then lies and tells Mankind that he did not do it?

“Seven.” This is a wordless repartee between Melchisedech Duffey and the invisible God in a garden in the afternoon. Everything is promised, and a solution to all problems. The only thing that could go wrong is so minor a thing that it would have to be sought out in stubbornness and confusion. And even if found and effected, the thing that could go wrong would not mean final disaster; not to everyone, maybe only to the one at whose hand it should go wrong would it mean disaster. But that person was Melchisedech Duffey. At the very least it would mean a reversion to a beginning for that misbehaving person. This seventh contingency would nullify some, but maybe not all of the others.

It wasn't clear whether Melchisedech had any power to choose between these cases. Anyhow, there wasn't any hurry about making the choices. Outside of Time, there can

be anxiousness, and anxiety, and even hysteria, but there cannot be hurry for that is tied to time. Melchisedech, hardly noticing it, had moved out of time and into moment. He had done this when he had come onto the sign that the girls had printed to advertise their play. And who else of the Duffey circle was it who was living in moment?

Yes, Duffey still got a weekly letter from his brother Bascom Bagby. He didn't, in his fractured state, receive clear communications from anyone else. But the Bagby correspondence was long-standing; it was outside of time; it was allowed.

"My dear brother," Bagby wrote. "Do not be alarmed over your present situation. You were in a somewhat similar situation during your 'Seven Lost Years'. You aren't dead. The people around you do not even notice your acting much different from your usual. You are skitting. You are in an adolescence. For some reason, you skipped adolescence in all your previous courses, going from long childhood to early manhood. Yes, there are often awkward and spooky accompaniments to an adolescence. There is psychic dislocation, and there is the familiarity of neutral creatures ('neutral spirits' we call them here; that's a sort of purgatorial joke). As a prodigious and special person, you attract them massively.

"Seven maids willing to marry you? The most I ever had at one time was five, but I was a slob. It shows that you are in a greening cycle, old patriarch.

"You are a fetish mark, like a crack in the sidewalk or a post by the road. This is a fetish that the fates and principalities step on or do not step on, touch or do not touch; since they set great store in this, and perhaps they determine a course by whether they have touched you or not. There is nothing lowly about being such a fetish. Even the grand ones cannot ignore you."

There was more. There was always more to Bagby's letters. And Duffey would have been lost without them.

Melchisedech met the Loosed Devil in a closed place. This, then, was at least the ante-room of the Sixth Contingency of the World that Melchisedech had entered. Would it prevent him from entering some of the other contingencies. No it wouldn't, not unless Melchisedech Duffey entered into covenant with this person.

"There are certain things that my client is always in need of," the Devil said. "He must always have a *Magus* or so on hand. At the moment he is very low on them. The last several of them were vaporized, soul and body. There was overreaction somewhere. I have heard that you are not the nervous type, and that you are a top *Magus*."

"I didn't know that we were rated, Clotie," Melchisedech said. "Yes, I am a *Magus*. I do magic. Having known several who worked for you, I can say that I am better at the trade than they are. But no two of us plow the same field, and no one can say who is top."

"Come work for my client, and you can wear diamonds," the Devil said in the corniest of the very old lines.

"I already wear diamonds," Melchisedech said, "Finnegan diamonds. Finnegan, wherever he is, is still in the diamond distributing business with the Hausa boy named Joseph. All Finnegan's friends wear diamonds. Do all of yours?"

"This Finnegan has reaped where he has not sown," the Devil said. "He is in deep debt to my client, and he will not come out of that house till all is paid. My client needs a *Magus* for certain creative work. It isn't that my client cannot himself create, but —"

"It is that you yourself cannot create, Clotie," Melchisedech said. "You can poison the springs and roil the land, but you cannot create."

"The creative fecundity is always at hand," this Devil said. "It didn't originate with my client, and it didn't originate with any *magus*. But sometimes, to awaken a thing

to a desired shape or inclination, we must bring to bear an influence or a secondary intervention."

"Nah, Clotie, nah, that's not the way I do it," Melchisedech said. "A cheap-shot *magus* may work by secondary intervention, but I do not. I actually create."

The Devil's eyes brightened when he heard this, and he rubbed his hands together. "That is what we want," he said. "We've always been hampered in the field of primary creation. Now you will work for me with your full magus powers. I said that you *will* work for *me*. I tell you: I do not ask you. You have no idea what mortgage I hold on you. I'm a canny fellow in all this, and I hold iron-studded mortgages on you, soul and body. And I'll not remit anything to you for coming over to me. I have it on your own word that you are a primary creator, so you will create for me. I compel you to—"

"Nah, Clotie, nah," said Melchisedech. "You'll not compel me." Melchisedech had scored a few shots. As to the question whether this was a minor devil of the Devil himself His Majesty, the fellow was using a tactic of speaking of his 'client' as if he himself were a mere agent or underling working for another. But then he would (Duffey could see it coming, what ham!) reveal that he himself was the client, the high Majesty. He would do this by a great pyrotechnic display that would be overpowering even if not convincing. But Duffey, by calling the fellow 'Clotie' (one might call a minor devil that, but not Himself His Majesty) had kept him a little off balance.

It wasn't settled. It's still going on. These out-of-time confrontations still continue while other things are going on also.

"But the devil or *Devil* is way ahead on points," Melchisedech deplored it in his own place while he was being outhandled by the devil on the devil's home field. "Why am I responsible? Oh, I suppose that I'm 'charge of quarters' for the world this day, and the highest ranking

non-com about. It might be that we could reverse the trend oil the devils, if only—

“—if only I could shape up another dozen of—and, with both the world and myself in a fractured state, it might be possible—well, since I have over-run the cutting edge and stand out of context, maybe I could—the old bunch does all it can—but there should be more for me to do than to wait for plaudits.

“If I could locate a fecund working area, and not be distracted by either threats or pleasures, I might be able to make—”

“To what extent are a potters’ dozen of us the Marvelous Animations of Melchisedech Duffey?

“To no extent at all. It is more likely that Duffey is an animation of ours. His undistinguished clay hulk was first known to Casey Szymanski and Hugo Stone (who was possibly myself) in Chicago, and to Mary Catherine Carruthers and to Margaret Stone in Chicago also. And before that, the clay hulk was known to those magicians Sebastian Hilton and Lily Koch. We all worked on Duffey, to see whether we could not shape him into something worthwhile. It was a sort of a game. So also did Giulio Solli, the Monster Forgotten, the Father of Finnegan, work on the Duffey. So did Finnegan himself, and Henri and Vincent, when they joined our acquaintance during the war. So did Mary Virginia Schaeffer and Dotty Yekouris and Showboat Piccone, though some of them had not yet seen Melchisedech Duffey. We made him what he is today, a moth-eaten magus who believes that he made *us*, and whom we love, for all his unlovely qualities.

“Such is my belief today, that he proceeds from us and not we from him. But there are other days when I believe irrationally that this Melchisedech *was* our maker, that he evoked our clay and awoke us to live, or to new life.”

[Absalom Stein. *Notes in a Motley Notebook*.]

“Where are you going, dear?” Mary Virginia Schaeffer asked Duffey in a worried voice one day. “You are so nutty lately that I wonder if you should be wandering around without a keeper.”

“I’m just going for one of my afternoon walks,” Melchisedech said.

“But for you, they are doomsday walks, Duffey,” she said.
“From one of them you won't come back.”

“In that case, have a double care of things, Mary Virginia.
Brood the world like the wonderful hen you are.”

“That man really is a magus,” Mary Virginia said
wonderingly when he had left, as if she had just realized it
for the first time.

“The Duff, he is a magus strange.

Hi! Ho!

The Duff he is a magus strange,

A holy magus with the mange!

Hi! Ho! The gollie wol!”

That was Margaret Stone who sang that. They should not
teach the Gadarene Swine Song to irresponsible persons.

It was not on that afternoon walk though that Duffey
walked over the edge. It was in a walk the next morning that
Duffey stepped into a pothole and nearly fell, and then
found himself in a somewhat changed world.

Book Eleven

"You, Melchisedech the brambled,
Deeply weathered, widely rambled,
Find the World Completely scrambled."

[Margaret Stone. *Tablets of Stone.*]

"In our own Philosophical language we may put the question thus: How did the real become phenomenal, and how can the phenomenal become real again... Or, to put it in more familiar language, how was this world created, and how can it be uncreated again?!"

[P.D. Ouspensky. *Tertium Organus.*]

So Clio scribes in manner blurred,
To sound of crackish gong:
She writes it down in every word,
And every word is wrong."

[Finnegan. *Road Songs.*]

What was different about the City all of the sudden?

The city had been, for some time now, different from any other place in the world. It was different for its hanging onto a certain stubborn and malodorous remnant. And the most stubborn and most malodorous part of that remnant was Zabotski.

Zabotski had once been a chemist, a smelly man in a smelly trade. He had retired from being a regular chemist now, and he had retired from a dozen trades, but he remained a smelly man. And there was something peculiar about this. He wasn't smelly to the nose. He was smelly to the eye.

Zabotski was probably rich. He owned a lot of property around town. He wasn't an unreasonable landlord. He carried more people that did those who bad-mouthed him. But he had an abrasive tongue, and he could outshout even Melchisedech Duffey in a shouting match. And he was in no way elegant. Likely the only one who loved him, beyond the

Christian requirement, was the Widow Waldo. Or was she Wife Waldo by now?

On this particular morning he was mumbling to himself, but when Zabotski mumbled he could be heard for half a block:

"There's a peculiar little episode hanging over our town. It's like a misshapen cloud, and it's been raining improper stuff on us for the last several hours of the night. It's hovering like a big buzzard, like a fancy-Dan buzzard with three peacock tail feathers tied on it. I think this dirty-bird episode will be a puzzler, and I may add to the puzzle. I'm going to claim that I have a main hand in it, just out of orneriness."

Zabotski sometimes waited around and offered his arm and his protection to Margaret Stone when she had finished her nightly giving of testimony in the Quarter. He liked to walk her back to the Pelican Press Building with a flourish.

Protection for Margaret Stone! Aw, come down from that perch! It was rather the town and the world that needed protection from Margaret.

"He's about the last of them," the people would sometimes say about Zabotski, and they'd shake their heads. The last of what? Ah, to answer that we must go on a spree of destruction that changed the face of the town and the country and disturbed some of the underpinning of the world itself.

So, this morning, Margaret Stone came in from her night in the Quarter wearing a gaudy button that read: 'Royal Pop History. Come and Make History With Us. Are You Splendid Enough?'

"Wherever did you get that, you splendid person, you?" Mary Virginia Schaeffer asked her.

"I made it," Margaret said. "A man was wearing the big button part of it for his convention name button. I took his name out and put the message in. A bunch called 'The

Society for Creative History', or else the 'Royal Pop Historians' is going to hold a meeting in town. It starts today. They say that their job is to get rid of a lot of unhistorical remnants in this town, just as they have gotten rid of them in the rest of the world. I better go to their thing. They may try to get rid of something that I want to keep. I suspect that they'll need me."

"I used to create quite a bit of history myself," Mary Virginia bragged, "but I don't do nearly as much of it nowadays."

"I don't think that's quite what the 'Society for Creative History' means," Margaret rattled in her dubious voice, "but maybe it is. They have topics listed like 'Get rid of that Stuff', 'History made while you wait', 'It doesn't matter — they're only human', 'Louts, Liars, and the Uses of Historical Evidence', 'The Holy Barnacle and the Pearl Beyond Price', 'Wax-Work History and the Ironic Flame', 'The Evidential World', 'Mountain-Building for Fun and Profit', 'History, Hypnotism, and Group Amnesia', 'Whoever Were Those People Who Lived Next Door to You Yesterday?', 'We said to Get Rid of that Stuff!', others that I forget. They're interesting topics. Oh, by the way, the Black Sea has disappeared and millions of people have been destroyed. It's all utterly obliterated, now and forever. The Royal Pop People say that it puts an end to the old geography."

"How could a sea be obliterated?" Mary Virginia asked. "Where did you read the announcement of such an historical meeting, Margaret? They sound like things that you made up."

"Read them? Whenever did I ever read anything. I'm not even sure that I know how to read. I don't remember ever doing it. No, this is just something that I know. Or it's something that I heard."

"Please don't go through all that recital again, Margaret, but can't you just tell me in two words what you're talking

about," Mary Virginia requested. "Absalom says that everything in the world can be described in two words."

"I know his two words. But what I'm talking about is Pop History. People of the Old Kind won't understand it very well, so the Royal Pop Historians say. The meeting starts today. I don't know where it is, but somebody said that Duffey might know."

"I didn't know that you were interested in history, Margaret. It sure was noisy in town last night. What was happening?"

"Sure I'm interested in history, Mary V. Papa used to have a book 'History of Cook County in the Early Days'. I'm from Chicago, you know."

"I know, Margaret. Did you read the book about the history of Cook County?"

"No. I never read it, but we had it. Papa bought things like that because he was trying to get used to being an American. Anyhow, I'm real noetic so I'll be a natural at something like history. What was so noisy last night was that funny wind blowing down the façades of the buildings and breaking up the old people and the old animals. It left a lot of trash in the streets. Not only that, but there's so many parks and courtyards and places this morning that weren't there yesterday that it causes one to wonder. They sure are gracious places."

"What old people and old animals are you talking about, Margaret? What funny wind? What fronts of buildings being blown down? How did they break up?"

"Well, I'll tell you, Mary V., I think that some of that stuff was from old Mardi Gras floats, or they were planning to be floats next season. The new people and the new winds were breaking up everything that wasn't splendid enough. There's one dragon that's big enough to load three floats pretty heavy. It's still alive a little bit."

"Are you talking about *live* people and *live* animals, Margaret? And what are these new parks and courtyards and

places that you're jabbering about?"

"Oh, the broken people and animals are mostly *papier-mâché* or rubber or styrofoam or plastic. After they break up and die that's all that's left of them. But some of them were pretty lively before the end. There was one fire-drake (or he was half man and half fire-drake) who bit a lady in the leg and got blood all over the street. Some people took her to Doctor Doyle with it. 'That's a terrible bite,' he said. 'I think it gave you infections draconitis. You have to show me what bit you.' He went out with the people to look at it. When he found out that it was just a fire-drake made out of rubber, and that it was fabulous besides, he didn't know what to think. But a laboratory has checked what the lady has, and it's infectious draconitis all right. They think she'll die."

"Margaret, what sort of convention was going on in town last night?"

"Oh, just three or four very ordinary ones. No, this is the straight dope, Mary V. I wasn't cordial on the stuff last night. And the courtyards and parks and nooks aren't new, except for not being there before. They're quite old and weathered, and they're full of almost the biggest trees in town. They're very ingrown and curious. New things aren't usually that ingrown and pleasant. And the thing that chokes me is that nobody remembers what was in those places yesterday. 'I live *there*,' one man said (you know him, he's that Russian Sarkis Popotov), 'and now there's a place next door to me named Artaguette Park. It looks unfamiliar to me, but some of those horsey tourists who are in town say that it'll look familiar by tomorrow. I've lived there for forty years, and I know that there were some kind of buildings next to me, but I sure can't remember what they were.' That's what old Sarkis said. And there are other places like that. The town's full of them this morning."

"What were the people in the Quarter drinking last night, Margaret?"

"Green Ladies mostly," Margaret Stone said. "You know, like Peppermint Schnapps, except with absinthe instead of the schnapps. That's what everybody has been drinking all week. Why don't you go with me to the Pop History meetings today, Mary Virginia?"

'Margaret was small and intense, with a large voice that was saved from stridence only by a certain music in it. But it broke at least once a week, and it wasn't nearly as large. She was Italian and Jew, with possibly a little bit of the Greek and the Pre-Adamite in her. She would have been beautiful in repose, but no one had ever seen her so.' So, at least, an old describer has described her. But he didn't mention the terrible tragedy and passion that was sometimes in her face. It was because people so seldom listened to what her musical voice said that there were such stark things in her face. The passion and tragedy in her face had increased lately. So had a certain threat that refused to give its name.

And Mary Virginia, her associate at the Pelican, had everything. Her kindness was extreme, but lately it had acquired a vacant quality, as though she could no longer remember just whom or what to be kind to. Her beauty alone would knock you off your stool forever. That had happened to a number of fellows. It wasn't true that her beauty had begun to fail in the last several decades. It had become deeper and fuller.

"As you know, I seldom get out of this place, Margaret," Mary V. said. "And the Pop Historians don't sound all as attractive as that. There are very many things going on this week, if I should go out. Horny Henderson is on the Trumpet at the Imperial John. They have a new singer at Red Neck's. Justin says that the Jazz Museum has so much new stuff over there that it'd take a week to see and hear it all. The Presentation at the Decatur Street Opera House this week will transcend everything. We have to go there tonight. There's a big bunch of new painters in the galleries and around Pirates' Alley, and Duffey says that one of the new

ones could almost be the ghost of Finnegan, the way he uses his oranges. There's a couple of Dominicans giving a mission at Ste. Katherine's. It's full of hell-fire, just like when we were kids. They say that our world will end, right here this week. The 'Nostalgia Club' should get hold of them. 'As American as hell-fire and apple-pie,' as Mencken used to write. And you want me to go to a Pop History Banger? And you don't even know where they're having it?"

The scene changes to just around the corner, over on Chartres Street or whatever street it was that Duffey now had his establishment on. Yes, there had been a new breeze blowing during the night. Well, it was a retrospective breeze. You remembered it now, hearing it, but you didn't notice it at the time when it had been happening. But now it was blowing for real, blowing down the façades, and some of the whole buildings, with a rattling and crashing. Duffey had been out very early, and had turned his ankle in a pothole. Then wild things began to happen, and they began *to have happened* for quite a few hours before. You wouldn't think that stepping into a pothole would make that much difference.

The scenery, the façades, the false fronts (but they hadn't been false till right at the time of their destruction) were toppling and breaking up in the streets outside, and there was the sound of tearing canvas and scorching rubber and stuttering styrofoam. It wasn't a joke. It was all straight impression. There really was something noisy and airish going on outside in the streets. It was like a strong experience of anthropomorphic colts, a great clatter of them.

"A Strong Experience of Anthropomorphic Colts!" Duffey howled at his own half-conscious word train that had been going through his head. "I've roused up with a mouthful of pretty crocky phrases before, but these anthropomorphic colts outrace them all."

Duffey never locked his doors, but sometimes (late at night) he did close them. He had inventories worth many thousands of dollars. These solid money items formed the heart of Melchisedech Duffey's Walk-In Art Bijou. And the bijou, the pawn shop, the various other enterprises, his living quarters, his very body were all members of this one establishment. He would not lock up any of them.

Yes, the door was still wide open, as he had left it when he hobbled in with his slightly twisted ankle. And he had heard a slight noise at that door, that came to him over the thumping and clattering noises in the streets. The door opened inward, as did Duffey himself. And there was a notice nailed to it that hadn't been there when he had re-entered an hour before. It was on some sort of old, yellowed poster cardboard, and it was nailed to the door with a long and ancient nail.

Duffey read the notice or message. It was in the new style of writing, so it was a non-verbatim message. The words 'Pop History' leapt out at him. Then other and more fearsome words came and ate up those first words, and established themselves with an easy arrogance. Slogans like 'We said to get rid of that stuff', and 'It doesn't matter—they're only human' took their places on the scroll, and then other phrases came forward and these withdrew to less emphatic levels. The whole thing was a proclamation, but it was a very tricky one.

Then Duffey again read what he could of it, with unbelief and near alarm. There was a difficulty about the words. Duffey still had some trouble with the new style of writing, even though words were one of his trades. But there didn't seem to be much doubt about the first meaning. Duffey was sociable: he was hospitable: but the message mentioned numbers that were overwhelming. It stated that he was favored and selected to lodge two hundred or more royal persons at his establishment. It stated that these were serious persons of a scientific sort, persons of blazing beauty

and towering mentality and perfumed perversion and breath-catching art: all this in the intensity and scope of the thunder dimension. That sounded like pretty vaunting stuff. It stated that such splendid persons were used to the best in accommodations. And it said that Duffey was selected for this honor because of his great age and erudition. It gave the name of the convening society. But something was missing from the name and message, something that can only be called verbatimness. There were very tricky things about the words of the message refusing to stand fast and be accounted for.

This Duffey has been called ‘a patriarch without seed, a prophet without honor, and a high-sounding brawler’. He was a man of uncertain age (this fact about him had assumed importance lately): and he was a willful man who was held on peculiar checkrein by forces unknown. But he was a spacious man and he could be forgiven many inconsistencies.

Duffey rocked on his feet and lowered at the writing and thought about it in an effort to make up his mind. It was a ritual sort of thing that was nailed to his door, and it deserved a ritual answer. Duffey got a pen and bowl, and he wrote an answer in his hieratic hand at the bottom of the scroll. It was not old poster cardboard that the scroll was made out of. It was now seen to be old parchment. Duffey wrote:

“Royal Pop People, I am honored. And you are welcome. But my facilities are quite limited, as is my credit. I will be host to as many of you as I can be. No man can do more. Somehow you will all be taken care of.

Signed, Melchisedech Duffey.”

He paused for a while, and he stirred the ink in the bowl. Then he wrote a bit more:

“If this is a hoax, then it's a howling hoax.”

Out of affectation, Duffey wrote all official things with this squid ink that he kept in a bowl. This was the finest ink ever. It will not coagulate. Write anything at all in squid ink. Then write something else beside it in ordinary ink. Come back in three thousand years, or even in ten years, and notice the difference. The squid ink will have remained true and unfaded; the other will have paled. But squid ink had gone out of fashion. The prime message on the parchment, however, was also written in squid ink, and there weren't many people who used it these last few centuries.

Duffey examined the parchment, and later he would examine it again and again. "We will come back to you, skin of a horny goat," he said. "Oh, how we will come back to you!" He turned his attention then to the nail that held it. It was large, and it appeared very sharp. It was not, as Duffey had at first thought, either brass or bronze. It was a copper-iron nail, and it was of old Macedonian workmanship. Odd, but not very.

For there were in that city many members of the "*Society of Creative Anachronisms*" , a social and historical and dramatic society. These people were all friendly to Duffey, and Duffey suspected them of a hoax. They put great effort in some of their hoaxes.

Duffey, a widow-man of loose and informal establishment, now made himself ready for the day and its apparent adventure. He caught again the whiff of the new breeze blowing, and part of that whiff was made up of putridity, that emanation of changes a-working. He dressed, daubed whiting on his beard and hair (they had both been turning disquietingly black lately), and went out into the streets to find comradeship and adventure and breakfast. Yes, there was indeed a new breeze blowing. It wasn't a great air-mover of a breeze; but it brought a rumbling freshness, a bracing and reminiscent aroma, a rakish sense of rot, and an

altogether vivid accord with things as they are and as they were becoming.

And it brought a sudden and happy discord with things as they had *not* been before. Certainly there had always been several buildings right next to Duffey's place, on the left when one comes out. And just as certainly those structures of whatever kind were not standing there now.

Just what was there was a little harder to say. One couldn't get a clear view of the area, or one wouldn't have believed his eyes if he had gotten a clearer view. The powers shouldn't spring these things on a man so early in the morning. Something was in the act of being born in that area. There were bales of greenery. There were bales of shadow. There were other bright things already there, or arriving. But this pleasant confusion hadn't quite put itself together yet.

The streets were trashy, though trash trucks were everywhere working on the clean-up. Here and there, the sidewalks were slippery with blood, but it was blood of no great validity. There was a lot of synthetic fiber lying around, and very little of authentic flesh.

And there were a few newly homeless cur dogs, and vacant oddity people, and evil spirits skulking about the sites. They had been dislocated from their places and from their forms. And their new and unpleasant confusion was another thing that hadn't been able to put itself together yet.

"It is you who have destroyed my house and my body," one of the uncreations hissed at Duffey. Duffey could not determine whether it was a cur dog or a snake or a spirit or a person. "It is you who have done it with that rectitude of yours," the thing said. Duffey did have his rectitude, but these uncreations did not seem to have much of anything.

"I cannot anyway remember who lived next door to me here," Duffey mumbled into his beard, not to the uncreations but to himself, "or who it was who transacted

business in this place so near to my own. This is a puzzle. And yet I've lived and worked here for several decades, and various persons have lived here beside me; I now suspect that they were nothing-people all this time, and that they have descended to their perdition or oblivion."

Duffey walked a block and noticed a handful of other disappearances and changes, as well as several pleasant new arrivals. Some of the broken-up puppets or dummies in the streets reminded him of persons whom he had known. Some of them opened effigy mouths and croaked at him in voices that he had known. The discarded little abominations were almost in bad taste.

But not everything had changed. Duffey entered one of the old and gracious places that had remained (considerably changed, though, it seemed, from the day before), and he sat down with a happy sigh. And a friend of his was sitting with him instantly. In that place, that always happens.

"I hear that you are playing host to some sort of historical group, Duffey," Absalom Stein was saying as they sat together and planned a breakfast at Girardeau's Irish Restaurant. Absalom was an Israelite in whom there was much guile, but he averaged out to a good man, and sometimes he wrote for the *Investigator* (that was Duffey's newest journal) as well as for the *Bark*. "How long is this convention going to last, Duffey?"

"I don't know at all," Duffey said. "All I remember are the words 'Pop History'. Then other words came out and gobbled them up and began to make demands for two hundred or more people. You seem to know something about it, so I suspect that you're in on the hoax."

"No I'm not, Duff, but I may get in on it. Why shouldn't I know about it? We have all become intuitive since (Oh, I guess it's just this morning), since we began to realize that we belonged to the new pleasant people. But there's a lot of loose stuff floating around town this morning, and I suspect that your 'Royal Pop History' bunch may be the handle to

take hold of it by. I'm afraid that they're going to make us give up a lot of our old items as not being splendid enough to keep."

"No, this man is not in on it," the young lady said to Duffey, "though I now invite him to join us. Oh, we never know how long these things will last. We will be in session until we get certain points settled and certain remnants rooted out. Your friend here, the Stein, is worried because a few people have gone away and he can't remember who they were. I say that if one can't remember them, then it's a good thing that they're gone. If they were superb and splendid enough, then they would be remembered. Let them pass out of all memory and be no more."

This young lady, she had 'Royal Pop People' written all over her. She was excessively one of them. She was 'The Countess', a teenage archetype among the Splendid People.

"But I have a peculiar affection and passion for unmemorable persons," Absalom Stein said carefully. "I feel that I'm responsible for some few of them that nobody else would bestow a thought on. I suspect that it's just that they are swallowed by oblivion if nobody remembers them at all, and then it would become the case that they had never existed at all. I can feel a dozen or so of them now, hanging on by the very nails of their fingers on the rim of oblivion, bawling against extinction, but almost certainly doomed to that pit or cauldron and be extinguished. So it will be with them if someone will not give them a thought. I come closest to remembering them of all the people left in the world; I know that. But I cannot come close enough. I could bring them back from nothingness if I could form their faces in my mind. I can't. But I'll still try it."

"You are playing with very sticky fire, Oh Absalom," the young countess said. "It may be that you will go with them to the nothingness where they have gone if you show such an unhealthy interest in them."

"What is it that you call your society, lady?" Duffey asked. Duffey couldn't remember just when this young lady had sat down at the table with them. He couldn't remember whether he knew who she really was. He seemed very slow at catching onto things this morning.

"Sometimes we call Ourselves the Thunder Harps," the countess lady said, "and sometimes we call ourselves other things. How is it that you have to ask me the nature of our group? You are a man of very great age and honor, and you are an affiliate of ours."

"What? Am I a Thunder Harp?" Duffey cried with breakfast heartiness. He was dislocated and confused by this new air of change or mutation, but he would never admit his confusion to the world.

"Oh, of course," the young lady said. "You've been one of us almost forever. You're one of the perennial bushes. I suspect that you're thousands of years old. You have those little green moss marks at the corners of your eyes, and there are many other signs. Why does it scare you, Duffey, when people spot you as one of the very old ones? Don't you want to be old and honored? And why ever should it startle you when you feel the green seasons returning to you and you know that you'll be appearing younger and younger for a few decades? You've surely been through these happenings often enough. How old are you anyhow?"

A waitress was pouring coffee powder into the urn. The name of the coffee was '*New Splendor*'. Duffey had honestly never heard of the brand before, and he wasn't sure that he liked it, if that was what he had been drinking. Oh, it had a lot of new tastes in it, and many of them were pleasant. And what about the eggs he was eating? What about the sausage? Did that come from a pleasant hog? But this was one of the new 'with-it' places, though barely. There was still some of the old showing through, in spite of signs that read '*Be Splendid*', '*Are You Splendid Enough?*', '*Be Splendid, or Perish*', '*Be Splendid, and If You Can, Be Noetic*'.

"How old am I?" Duffey mumbled. This young lady had asked the unsettling question that Duffey had never been able to answer. Well, how old did that lady think that *she* was? She looked to be about seventeen years old. She wore the scent named 'Timeless', but who could be sure of her? She was just one of the 'New Royal Pop People' who had taken over the directorship of everything. And how did she happen to be eating breakfast with them?

"Duffey, you've been using whiting on your beard and hair again," Stein accused. "Why do you do it? Why not let them turn black again if you're on that cycle? If you're supposed to be young for a few decades, then be young. Really, you'd look better young, and I can't think of anyone else of whom that's the case. You were always very boyish. But just what is this 'green seasons' affair that the lady is talking about? And, yes, just how old are you anyhow, Duffey?"

Stein had always been splendid. And he had always been noetic. He had sure, in his youth at least, been a 'Royal Pop Person', in that he had even been a little bit before his time. But would even he be at his total ease in this new ambient?

"I don't know what the young lady is talking about?" Duffey said. "But I'd wondered for a long time why all of you in our bunch hadn't noticed that I've been growing younger."

"What is to notice?" Stein asked. "When I was a boy in Chicago, you were an old man. Quite old, Duffey. When I met you this last time, thirty or more years ago, you still seemed several decades older than the rest of us, but not nearly so old as you had been earlier. Now you seem several decades younger than the rest of us. That's all there is to it. It's sort of a silly way you have of getting attention, Duffey, turning younger. And to notice it would only be to humor you."

"It isn't as though this hadn't happened to you before, Melchisedech", the young pop lady said. This lady had an impudent and archaic grin. She was bright and fundamental,

as though several of the duller outer layers had been lifted off of her. Duffey had terra cotta figurines in his bijou that were of the same period as this young lady and that very much resembled her and her grin. Some of them were ancestral to the Etruscan, and some of them were splendid fakes. The terra cotta process and its finish are easily faked. The archaic grin is more difficult. But who was to say that this mysterious young lady was not a fake? She seemed disquietingly genuine though, on the new terms. Duffey had felt a real chill at the mention of the anomaly of his own unaging. It had never been mentioned out loud before. And the new breeze blowing today was not really new. It was an old, old breeze with its green seasons returning. But was there not (Duffey was trying to remember how it had been on this point, and he was not remembering well), was there not something illicit and tainted about that old cyclic thing?

“What had barnacle-removing to do with history?” Absalom Stein suddenly asked the young pop lady. He must have seen the prospectus on the subjects of discussion at the historical meeting: *‘The Holy Barnacle, and the Pearl Beyond Price,’* and he must have sensed the irony of calling the barnacle holy. Duffey recalled that the non-verbatim notice that had been nailed to his door had mentioned barnacles or barnacle-removing somewhere.

The young pop countess did not answer. She had the air or supposing that it would be a little bit *infra* for her to answer so obvious a question as Stein had posed.

“Duffey, you'd better get back to your place,” Mary Virginia Schaeffer said as she came into Girardeau's Irish Restaurant. “Oh, you *do* have it splendid here, Girardeau! How could you have changed it so much since yesterday? Maybe your place won't have to be destroyed at all. Duffey, those people are crowding around your place, and they look like the lively sort that doesn't like being crowded or kept waiting either. If any of us can help you out, just let us know. What was going

on in town during the night anyhow? Margaret Stone is being very noetic about something, and the town does have a different look to it this morning. I mean it's so splendid! Besides the trash, that is. I just don't know what to make of some of that trash. It wrings my heart the way some of it looks like old friends with forgotten names, and they try to speak to me. It's as though blinders had been put on my eyes and on my mind as regards some of those smashed things. People say that everything that isn't really splendid has got to go. Why does it have to go? Why?"

"Do not be asking such unsplendid questions, the Mary Virginia," the young pop countess said. "That is dangerous for you. It may be that you will be found unsplendid and will be trashed also."

Mary Virginia bought a sack of Girardeau's special greaseless doughnuts (They aren't doughnuts: they are 'Pop Tortuses' now,' Girardeau told her), and some tabouli wheat. Then she went out again. She had a scattering of gray hairs in that witching halo that framed her face. Duffey hadn't known that about her before, and he'd known her for more than thirty years. Perhaps she was acquiring the gray that he was losing. And it was natural that she should turn from a beautiful young lady to a beautiful middle-aged lady with the attrition of the years. Those things happen to everybody.

To everybody except Duffey. Duffey would need a change of blood if he kept getting those chilling thoughts. He knew now that he was very old, and that this business of him getting younger for a few decades was a very old business indeed.

"Yes, I'd better get back to my place," he said. "I hadn't expected guests to arrive so early in the morning. I wonder why they chose me."

"There is no need for you to hurry, Duffey," the pop countess said. "We are all perfectly able to make ourselves at home anywhere. I'm sure that my associates have already taken possession of your things and put them to use. We

aren't at all backward about affairs like that. And we chose you because we like you, because you were a 'pop person' anciently, because you are already one of us, and because you are the oldest and most honored person in this town."

"Ah, just how many of you pop people are there in town?" Duffey asked. "I forget."

"And what did you say was the name of your society and principality?" Stein asked. "I also forget."

"Legion," the Pop Countess said. "That is the answer to both of your questions."

"I am going down to check some courthouse records and tax rolls," Stein said as they were out in the street again. "These disappearing and unremembered buildings and properties must have left records behind them. And I will check old city directories also. These disappeared people must have left records also. I will worry until I find the answers."

"Oh ancient Stein (hey, that's the same as saying 'Oh, old pot!'), you'll not find them that way," the Countess chided him. "Those were nothing buildings and no-count properties, and they were inhabited by nothing-people. Get that into your whopper-sized head, or you may be reclassified as a nothing-person yourself. And, no, they will not have left any traces or records. You are wasting your time, and that is an illicit luxury now."

"I must find out," Stein said. "What, am I an ancient one too?"

"Yes, ancient, archeo, time-soaked, and you were one of the crewmen on the ship which now must become splendid or be scuttled," the young countess said out of her archaic grin. "Old, old, but not so old as the Melchisedech here."

Stein went off to check courthouse records and tax rolls and old directories. He returned and went again several times. He was nervous to get to the bottom of this business.

"Be along and get your own piece of this neighborhood

straightened out," Zabotski called to Duffey a little later as Duffey was hurrying home. "Your place is clear out of order, Duff. Straighten it out, or I'll have the pack of you assailed for Unlawful Assembly or with Unseemly Crowding in Countervention of the Fire Laws. Man, what is it over at your place anyhow, a mob scene from Hades? First, they overflowed your place, and now they're impinging on mine. I have the feeling that these are the latter days of the world, for me maybe, not necessarily for everybody. Say, they keep asking for a shanty ship that they think I have here. 'Where have you hidden it?' one of them asks. 'It's too big for him to have hidden,' another says. 'Maybe he hasn't built it yet.' Do you know what they're talking about, Duffey?"

"Yes, I think I do. I remember it a little bit."

"Wife Waldo thinks that she remembers it a little bit too, but I sure don't. Whatever it is, they'll destroy it if they find it. Say, Duffey, didn't I used to own some buildings that were just next door to you on the right as I go in? It seems like I did, but I forget."

"So do I forget it, Zabotski," Duffey said sadly. "But the things that are disappeared and forgotten were probably owned by some such an easily forgotten person as yourself."

"Will you forget me, Duffey, if I perish this night?" crude Zabotski asked.

"Aye, I'll forget you," Duffey said. "It would be easy to say that I'll remember you, but I'll not recall the least lump of you."

"Duffey, thou *cladhaire*, I'll split thy head!" Zabotsky sputtered in stylized fury.

"Have a care, *Eabhraioch*," Duffey bantered him. "Your tongue will turn black and fall out if you misuse the holy language so. Quiet, Zabotski, quiet!"

"That tongue is not holy," a pop person said sharply. "It is not splendid."

And Duffey hurried along home. It was just around the corner from where they talked. But the irritation drained

away from him as he neared his home and got a look at that throng that had taken it over. A mob? Yes. Unseemly crowding? Perhaps. Unlawful assembly? Oh no, you can't cite folks of such high quality for unlawful assembly. The mob, oh the essential thing about this mob was that it was a mob with class. Even the mobbish sound of it was a vivid orchestration. It was a finely done instrumentation of happy thunder and mountain echoes, with a strong underlay of 'roaring river' timbre. Every mob has its own tone. Well, this mob had a pleasant though challenging tone to it, and it rang like thousands of large gold coins.

And look at the confabulating people who made up that noisy bunch! Duffey was reminded of a phrase used by the Lord himself for an earlier mob, "In the brightness of the saints." He was reminded of the phrase 'The Splendid People' that these pops used for themselves. And Duffey was delighted with them even though it was his own place that they were near to bursting the walls out of.

There is much to be said for elegant shooting and brimming banter when it is used by such really classy folks with their silver tongues and their bronze lungs. There were something like the sort of people that Melchisedech had attempted in his own 'Splendid Animations', though he did not go quite so far in one or two treacherous directions. These were people with a stunning style and with a rippling and dazzling color and costume. But how could there be so many of them here? The very presence of such folks had effected a growth and change in Duffey's buildings. This was a new sort of calculation that was called 'The Geometry of Shining Space.'

Duffey's house was now very much larger than he himself remembered it. He went through the back rooms of it, and through those rooms that were still farther behind them. There were constructions in Duffey's own intrepid and inexact carpentry everywhere. As a carpenter, Duffey was one of the great originals. He himself had built all the rooms

of these buildings except for the front two tiers which had already been there when he came. But had he built as many rooms as these? He was like a man encountering strange things in his own handwriting. "It's my own writing, but when did I write such things," he might say. "It's my own carpentry, but whenever did I carpenter such rooms as these," he did say. Many of the back rooms had to intrude onto a piece of property that belonged to Zabotski. There was no calculation whatever that would allow them to be on Duffey's own land.

"Ah, I can't think of any overbearing neighbor that I'd rather intrude on," Duffey thought with laughter. But the building couldn't have extended so deeply before today, or Zabotski would have made the howling trespass known to the whole town.

Duffey explored through the bright crowds in his own Art Bijou, through those in his own bookstore, through those in his pawn shop, through those in his auditorium, through his soup kitchen, and through those in his flop house. Never had the places been so full except for the few times when he had staged those 'Original-Masterpiece-For-Eighty-Five-Cents-Frame-And-All' Saturday sales. But these crowds today were made out of extraordinary people, exuberant as colts, touchy as velours, bright as primary-color-baked terra cotta, superior in their scoundrelry and their saintliness, big-bellied with fresh life and invention, incredibly urbane and sophisticated, adolescent and arty and archaic all at the same time.

Oh, Duffey knew some of them, of course. There was the 'Child-Hero', there was the 'Hoyden', there was the 'Countess' (how had she got there before him when he had started soonest?), there was the 'Sanctimonious Sam'. But are these not types? No, they are people. They are the everlasting and omnipresent people. And, though it seemed as if there were more, there was only one of each sort of them. Who would ever turn these great originals into types?

But beyond these pop people who seemed to have come to town from everywhere, there were the more local and less typical folks. There was Danny Degas who was history professor at Lsuno College there in town, Hugh de Turenne who was deep in the humanities at Xavier, Sister Mary Susanna of Ursuline Academy, Robert Darnley who was historical in residence at Dillard. And there was the dozen of those tome-toting eccentrics from the deep Quarter who had each been working for thirty years on a thirty volume history of the world.

And there were the fine experts in the special fields of history: Berny Cacciatore who was the finest historian in the world on boxing and other sports; Bulu Belonki who was the non-pareil historian of jazz. There were high historians from all over the world, some known to Duffey, some known only to God. There were the flash-wits who were not thought of as orthodox historians.

These were all nimble people. History had just made a fundamental change in itself, with the defeat and obliteration of its old subject matter and the triumph of the new. Similarly, the art of geometry and the art of words had just made deep changes in themselves to accommodate the new conditions.

There were also present many eminent persons in the field of hard science. There were physicists and exophysicists, chemists, and nuclear nabobs. There were biologists and brainstylers and mathematicians. And there were also the psychologists and the cultural gestalters and the transcendental philosophers. There were music folks, artist folks, and both grid and linear narrators. Since history included everything, Duffey supposed that all these folks belonged to the conclave. And he had found that there were many other conclaves of other sorts going on all over town. After all, there are such things as pop biology and pop veterinary medicine and pop theology and pop open heart surgery. There was pop astronomy and pop aerodynamics.

They all of them had to be nimble folks who were involved, since all of their sciences were now of the new and fearlessly nimble sort. Everyone here was clearly highly qualified, of the veriest elite. But even that many highly qualified persons will take up a lot of room. There must have been a thousand unassorted persons crowded into Duffey's buildings, and there was not a doused light or an empty head among them.

A ram's horn blew a lowering blast. And it was time for the first sessions to begin. The first speaker had a smiling and unhurried incandescence about him, and he spoke in a high and singing voice that can only be described as brindled thunder laughing down the valleys that weren't there yesterday, and as hooves pounding through flame-green grass. But why put it so fancy? He spoke like a thunder colt. "We are all pleased to see each other," he began. "We return to our continuing and never really interrupted sessions now. We ask again (it should be the oldest one of us present who asks it, but Duffey's tongue hasn't been taught nimbleness yet) the ritual question: 'What is History?' And the answer comes: 'History is everything that has happened up till now'. And then we ask (it should be the youngest one of us here present who asks it, but the 'Child Hero' has let his attention travel elsewhere): 'What is *now*?' And so we move into our pleasant discussions and difficulties. *Now* is the all-embracing moment, so our composite answer really is 'History is everything in the *Now*. Or it should simply be: 'History is everything.'

"Our fun and our fascination will always be to track the cubs of the wild history cat to their lair. It is to winnow the golden dust that we call historical evidence and to discover that it is really the green dust of life. And we can track the cubs. We can winnow the dusts to a final arrival and solution every time. There is nothing that can hide from history, or from ourselves who are the shapers and pruners of history.

Where would anything hide? Everything is in the moment *now*, and we are the lords of this *now*."

The speaker wore a rakish and gaudy turban, and a gaudy and exuberant gem or eye sparkled and winked from the middle of it. This gave the impression that the real face was up inside the turban, and that it was a false face that the speaker was talking from. He went on.

"We now have techniques of research and reconstruction that allow us to answer any historical question. More, they allow us to say 'We were there'. A primitive deity once asked a number of questions of a man who was not able to answer them. We pose as challenge here and now. Ask those questions of us! Here are some of them, and our answers.

'Have you ever in your lifetime commanded the morning and shown the dawn its place?'

"Yes we have. We did it this morning, only two hours ago. And the local scene is still a little bit upset about it."

'Have you entered into the sources of the sea, or walked about in the depths of the abyss?'

"Sure we have. Depth Oceanography has made these things commonplace."

'Have you entered into the storehouse of the snow, and seen the treasury of the hail?'

"Sure we have. Every weather reconnaissance pilot has done it."

'Is it by your discernment that the hawk soars, that he spreads his wings towards the South? Does the eagle fly up at your command to pass the night at his lofty nest?'

"Yes, and again yes. We are doing considerable ornithological engineering now, and we are implanting completely new patterns in many of the birds."

'Have you fitted a curb to the Pleiades, or loosened the bond of Orion?'

"No, we haven't, primitive deity, and we don't believe that you have done it either. But we are working on it. We will bet that we do it before you do."

"There are not ghosts of the past that we track down and set right. Really, there are no ghosts. There are only some persons or things that are wasted more than others. And there is no 'past'. There are certain times and incidents that have been misplaced. But we can find them, all of them, buried in barrows or trapped under the cement of barnacles, and we can free them from their incrustations. But even we adepts are in danger of thinking in terms of inimical incrustations and surrogates, in treating some events as though they were not still happening. What? If a thing is not still happening, then how will it be revised? It is for the ordering and revision and clarification that we come together for these

continuing meetings. That, and to reassure ourselves, and to enjoy each other's company.

"When we as a people arrive at our full splendor, then we create a sparkling history for ourselves, and we devise noetic and sophisticated and splendid techniques. Ah, the tracking down, the digging up, the freeing, with the finest weapons and tools ever, that's where the fun is. It is the rich ritual of historical evidence, the formula in our own hands of what was and is and what shall be. We will keep it all in our hands. A line by an always contemporary poet reads, 'Here lies one whose name was writ on water', as though that name might become difficult to read after the water had grown old and forgetful. But this is not the case. The reading would never be difficult, not to initiates like ourselves. Even the writing of it on rapidly running water would make the reading of it just about difficult enough to be interesting. It's always easy to develop transparencies from living water.

"I have heard it said by an erudite man that it would be wonderful to have placed recording microphones at various spots in the time and place of history. Oh, but it has been done! We have the recordings of billions of such microphones, we have the recordings of billions of cameras. We use such microphones all the time! I have never found a dingle or dell on this earth in which there were not many such microphones. Stones are the most common recorders. Everywhere, to a person with informed eyes and ears, these stones shine and shout their presence. It is in their thin (but not so thin as a non-historian might imagine) patinas that we can read complete histories.

"We commonly live or peel off transparencies at six-second intervals. Each such transparency will give a detailed and accurate analysis of the air for its period, the temperature, direction of wind, light intensity (whether in shade or sunlight or dark night or bright night; even, from the angle of the shine, the hour of the day and the day of the year), sulphur content of the air, significant pollen, aroma, and quality generally. Do you realize that it would take fewer than three hundred billion such six second intervals, less than three hundred billion such transparencies to carry us back through the last fifty thousand years of history, the period in which we are most interested, the period since our own first appearance. We can go deeper, of course, but frankly we have not yet the technique to go more than ten times deeper, or to about half a million years. Beyond that, we lose accuracy. But why should we go deeper than our own period? In those murky depths we find only animals and uncouth creatures and peoples who are not ourselves.

"But we can slice the transparencies much thinner than six seconds. We can slice them down to a hundredth of a second for any period we wish to focus upon. Six second interval is merely cruising speed or hunting speed. The patinas deposited on good rock surfaces can be lifted down to the thickness of a single molecule.

"Complete visual pictures, from any aspect or direction, can be reconstructed of anything whose light or shadow fell even indirectly on one of our stones. We can get detailed pictures of animals, of plants, or

people as they lived and moved thousands of years ago. We can reconstruct color pictures of the clouds moving overhead, and we can read the spectra of those clouds for trace materials trapped in them. We can reconstruct anything that was ever visible, that was ever to be discerned by any of the senses, that was ever subject to any sort of analysis. Give us a dozen tuned stones (they resonate to each other, and those of the same locale will always know each other) and we can reconstruct a complete countryside for any period we wish. We can zero in on an individual grasshopper in that countryside. We can zero in on a virus infecting that grasshopper, and we can analyze it. We can prescribe for that virus, but we are not yet able to send medication back to that ancient grasshopper. If it were important, we would find a way to do even that. Nor would the various upheavals that might seem to scramble the rocks and their records make as much difference as you might suppose.

"We can trap sounds and play them back with perfect fidelity. We can play the song of the ancestral cicada that had two more chromosomes than its present descendants have. The old cicada (it is only coincidence) had two more notes in its song. We can say what the two disappeared chromosomes were. We can even, by very advanced techniques, duplicate those chromosomes.

"And smells! Of course they are even more simple than sounds to life in the transparencies. We can go back and pick up nearly every scene complete for the last fifty thousand years. We can do it at ten times that depth, if there were anything interesting happening there. The patinas and deposits on stones and other things are only one of the dozens of tools that we have for such historical reconstruction."

"If I had a rock in this room, could it tell me the hanky panky that my husband does when I'm gone?" a woman asked. She was a walk-in from the street. She wasn't an associate of the pop historians. "If it takes a special rock, where could I get one?" she asked.

"Oh, it takes at least a dozen seasons to set patina layers so that they can be removed as transparencies," the speaker said. "I don't know why this is so, but it does protect and make privileged all current information from the hot eyes and gawky ears of suspicious persons. You wouldn't be interested in hanky panks that are more than a dozen years old, would you?"

"I sure would," the woman said. "I want to find about them as far back or as close up as I can go. Where can I find one of these rocks?"

"Oh, any rock in the vicinity will do. But just any technician will not do," the speaker said. "We exercise a certain discretion as to just what patinas should divulge their information to whom. But many things other than rocks have secrets."

"Aye, goat skins have secrets too," Duffey told his beard. He had been thinking about the parchment that he had found nailed to his door that morning. Now he was inspired to use his own technique to lift transparencies and tracings from it. The parchment was still on the door. Duffey realized that it was a proclamation and that it was intended to remain there for the stay of the Royal Pop Historians.

He rolled a violet light thing through the throng and to the door. Several of the people, the child hero, the hoyden, the countess and others, were very interested in his doings. They followed him about as he made his hook-up.

"Why do you use that obsolete apparatus?" the child hero asked him. "There is nothing intuitive about it at all, nothing dumbfounding, nothing splendid. I wouldn't be caught dead with an apparatus that wasn't in some way dumbfounding." Duffey's violet light wasn't obsolete. He had bought it that very year. His older violet light had been obsolete but still workable. But neither of them had very intuitive or dumbfounding in their operation.

"What is it with you children?" Duffey demanded. "This does not make great speeches, but it works. Well, what is the latest thing that you Pop Historians would use to define the depth and past history of this goat skin?"

"For such primary work as that, where the levels are the doings and undoings of people (some of them probably human), and with so few such recordings a peach branch would probably be the newest and most sophisticated device," the child hero said. "It must be a forked branch, and it must be cut like—"

"Like a dowser's forked stick," Duffey finished. "Yes, I have one of them somewhere. I often use it. And also I often use my violet light here." In his business of art dealer and pawn broker, Duffey often examined things by his violet light. It would bring out underlays of paintings. It would bring out filed-off serial numbers of pawned equipment. And also he often used his dowser's forked stick which was from a red peach tree. It would tell whether blood had been shed in the history of an article or artifact. It would tell particularly whether there was a murder in the history of ownership of an item (only the forked sticks told all those things scientifically and not intuitively).

For this particular job, the violet light was best. The parchment was a palimpsest, written over many times and scraped imperfectly. The latest underlay of it was quickly made manifest under the violet light. It consisted of some unfamiliar verses of Boëthius, but it was in his overly familiar style.

"I never cared for his doggerel," Duffey said. "It would be valuable in a money way, I suppose, but essentially his stuff is completely worthless. May the weedeater take him!"

"He was never really one of our group," the child hero said. "There was just too much of the human element in him."

The next underlay was a first century copy (or perhaps it was the original) of the Fourth Gospel. It had marginal notations in the *pagona* shorthand that had been secret for so many centuries, and indeed had been cracked only two centuries before this time. The document had the sweep of understanding and authority both in its lettering, and in the hen script of its shorthand.

"A fine hand," Duffey said. "I wonder if it was his own."

"Oh, it was, it was," said the hoyden. "If we had realized that it was on this piece, perhaps we would have used another piece of parchment and given this one special care. Did you ever know him, Duffey? He was one of our group. And he was so patient and thoughtful. He once put up more than two hundred of us in a small-sheep shed. I don't know how he did it, but he made us feel at home. That was one of the better segments of our always-continuing meeting. Yes, this is the original. But of course the thing can be found in print now, so there's no need to save even good hand. And there is only about a thousand word segment on this."

The next latest underlay was a spate of priceless drivel of the classical Greek era. Well, what more can one say about it. It was priceless. And it was drivel.

"It's fake, of course," the child hero said. "All of the classical period was a fake. There wasn't any classical period in reality. You'll hear more of that. It's a favorite colt-to-ride of Cyrus Roundhead who will be speaking by and by."

Then, a bit deeper on the goat skin, there was a highly polished passage of epic from one of the pre-pre-Homerics.

"No need to flash that into the light of day," Duffey said. "It's good and it's important, but it would only excite the scholars."

"He belonged to us once," the child-hero said, "but then the weed chopper cut him down. There were a lot of defections among the pre-pre's."

A bit earlier then, there was all imposing, closely written, clearly alphabetical screed from the pre-alphabetical time. It might easily establish itself as the earliest alphabetical writing known. And below this there were many depths of writings and scriptings. But Duffey, not wishing to tip his hand, went no deeper at this time.

"Times are hard," he whispered hoarsely in his shyster voice, for he had come under the influence of a part of himself that he could never control, "and I don't know where the devil I'd ever find a buyer for the thing. But I feel generous today, and I cannot resist the plea in your entreating eyes. I'll go nine dollars for this worthless old piece of goat skin."

There were peals of laughter from the countess and several others of the people there. The child hero was too choked up with merriment to laugh out loud. But for the kindness of it, the laughter would have shriveled Duffey irreparably. The laughter meant that the parchment was not for sale. It meant that not nine dollars, or even nine million dollars would touch it. It meant that Duffey was a perfect clown in this: so he accepted the role. But he would dearly have loved to have that parchment for nine dollars or even nine thousand. He put his violet light away. The parchment would never lodge permanently in Melchisedech Duffey's Walk-In Art Bijou.

Back in the auditorium, the main and largest room of the Duffey buildings, the opening speaker was still holding forth on stones and their patinas.

"We forget that our time scale is purely conventional," he was saying, "and that all events are pretty much simultaneous. Take the case of God, and the person who presently holds most persuasive claim to that position. There was a sort of vacancy several months ago, and the question was which strong man would seize the opportunity. There was one man (who almost certainly had suffered a human interval), who had mutated quite recently (though some maintain that it was his second mutation), and who learned the total trick of time-dealing while doing so. Then he intruded himself back into time, into history and history's records, into the oceanic unconscious mind that is shared by both creatures and uncreatures: and so he became God. Certainly he is all-powerful and all-knowing and all-present now... Part of his peculiar mutation was his mastering of the tricks of power and knowledge and location. And certainly he created the worlds. Or at least he created the historical evidence that he created the worlds. That's almost the same thing."

"How long has he been established in this position?" Duffey asked from the floor. "I try to keep up with such things."

"About three weeks," the easy speaker said. "We'll give him another couple of months and then assay him a little more completely."

"I'd certainly challenge one who went back no further than that in his power," Duffey maintained stubbornly, "even if his power includes the mastery of historical evidence and of simultaneousness."

"Oh, he is being actively challenged," the speaker said. "There are at least three main challengers. Back to our subject then, for simultaneity and backward intrusions remain deep mysteries that are beyond many of us. Stones of the countryside are not our most important records, as there isn't very much going on in the country. Transparencies and live tracings may also be lifted from city stones, whether they are natural or artificial. Several of our members are at this very moment busy at lifting transparencies from certain strategic stones that are built into the Decatur Street Opera House of this very city. Sometimes one hears the expression 'if these stones could only talk!' People, we initiates know that these stones *can* talk.

"There are several special stones in and around the old opera house which is our demonstration for today. Know you all that there is a private corner in every inspired builder, that this private corner of the person knows about special stones. It may know about them only while the man is asleep but it knows. And the man, while the construction of the building was going on, will convey the command (he may convey it without knowing that he does so, or he may know that he does it and still wonder at himself), will convey the command that several special stones are to be built into the building and around the building. And the building will then become memorable. It will become resonant and in accord with its town and its times. It will accumulate living legends, and memories and ghosts. The old opera house in this city is such a building.

"Two dozen cheap gem stones or gim cracks on the inside of that building do hold the total record of the short but tumultuous two-

hundred-year history of the building. They not only have the all-sense record of every performance that has been played on those boards, but they have the record of every person who has attended each performance. They have the record of every gesture of every person. They have the record of every accent and sigh and word and whisper of every person. And also, by highly scientific extrapolation of every contingent datum, they have the probable content of the most improbable thoughts of every person who has ever been there. Minor miracles of intrapolating gestures and expressions into thought have been wrought. Major miracles in extracting fine transparencies from stoney patinas have been achieved.

"The gim crack stones will have the glow of every wax candle or rush light that ever lighted the performing house. They have the hot wax smell, and the rush-fat smell, even the evocative rig-wick stench. They have the glittering and guttering of the bear oil that was burned in the earlier days, of the whale oil, of the pig lard lamps. They have the whispering sound and flicker of old illuminating gas flames, the garishness of the limelights and the carbide lights, the later and stronger shine of the electrical chandeliers and of the mercury spotlights. Oh, do any of you remember the unearthly whiteness of the old sodium lights? The stones will remember it."

The speaker had a stone that was apparently set into his turban, but closer examination would show that it was set into his head. The speaker was a highbrow in the literal sense. The stone was one of the best, and it had recorded many scenes in many years.

"And there are some quaint stones set in the outside of the building, and all in the surface of Decatur Street itself," the speaker went on. "There is one old *dalle* or flagstone that would be recognized as distinguished by any investigators. It was set in the midst of the random rocks when the road was first laid out. This stone developed a will of its own, and it has survived a dozen changes. By accident (but there are no accidents), it was not discarded when the first random stones were thrown out and the slates and the mud shales were brought in to give the street a better finish. And the special flagstone survived when these old slates and mud shales were replaced by ironstone cobbles. It maintained its place even when the cobbles were replaced by bricks. It prevailed again when it was buried clear up to its eyes in asphalt. What things it could tell if it had tongue."

Duffey, like the good host he was, had rolled in several barrels of hard cider and had brought out his collection of three hundred cider mugs and put them to service. The Royal Pop People and walk-ins who had joined them appreciated it. It was good cider from Arkansas apples.

"Well, we will give that stone a tongue now," the speaker said in cider-smacking accept. "That stone remembers the underbellies of thousands of horses and carriages that stomped and rushed over it. Ah, what great horse vehicles those were! Who now living, except possibly our host Duffey, remembers them all? The Acme Top and the Acme Open, the Southern Beauty, the Fulton Road Cart, the Livery Special, the Farmers'

Canopy-Top Surrey, the Johnson's Jump-Seat Buggy, the Imperial Carriage, Dempster's Three-Spring Handy Wagon (it was a 'wagon' that even swells and dudes drove to the Opera in), Drexel's Eight-Horse, Dray, Pontiac's Special Milk Wagon, Hallock's Grocery Cart, the Sears Famous, the Road Runner. Ah, I see brimming eyes at the memory of these things. The fragrance of old road apples will always be a primary part of nostalgia."

"What is the purpose of these rhapsodies, Countess?" Duffey asked the girl.

"Actually, we're so new that we don't have much detailed history of our own," she said, "and we sure don't want to borrow any history from the second-rate humans. But we can steal some of their memories and things, and we can claim them for our own. And there was at least a handful of pop people around here during the old horse carriage days. I'm on a nostalgia kick myself. Ah, the fragrance of road apples! I wonder what they were like?"

"That stone on Decatur Street remembers the quickening snap and bang of whips," the speaker said, "and their airy swishing. Ah, the Cowles Buggy Whip, we shan't see its like again! The Jacksonville Drover, the S.R. and Co's Australian, the Western Mule Skinner, the Milford Quirt, Hodson's Superior Horse Whip, the San Antonio, the Fancy, the Never-Break Dog Whip, the Elko. What days do these not bring back! The cursing of wagoners, the rattling of whipple trees, the jangle of even chains! Some of these things still live in the blessed place, and others of them have been cut down by the weed hacker."

The speaker had a new mellowness in his voice that only a couple of mugs of good Arkansas cider will give.

"That stone remembers the undersides of old street cars," the speaker said. "It even remembers the round punchings of old street car transfers wafting down on the easy breeze, blessed confetti! And the odor of trolley ozone! It remembers the underside of every automobile that ever went down Decatur Street, and I dare not roll their names off my tongue lest nostalgic riots might ensue."

What, if the Royal Pop People had a weakness for nostalgia, Duffey saw a good thing for himself. In the back rooms of his Walk-In Art Bijou, he had tons and tons of forgotten nostalgic items.

"The stone recalls faithfully every two-legged and four-legged walker of the street," the turbaned speaker said. "And it remembers, from the underside also, the jeweled sky of eighty thousand nights. It's a very talkative old stone, and it is talking to our experts and their instruments at this instant."

The speaker had two large and complex shining blue eyes. They may have had special, small, remembering stones set into their irises. Many of the Royal Pop people had this double-irised look to their eyes. "What about the stones that look in the other direction?" asked a person who was not a full member of the Royal Pop Historians and Flesh Weeders. "Are there any stones whose patinas have recorded future events?"

"There are stones whose living surfaces and depths reveal events in every direction," the speaker said. "There are not any 'future' events.

'Future' is only the name of a putative direction so designated by those who have lost their directions. Oh certainly, it is quite easy to lift transparencies and tracings and reproductions of what are commonly called future events. All common stones will serve for all purposes, but exceptional stones are needed to give fine and minute service. Those that record the best from all directions are the half gem or gim crack stones, the spars, the garnets, the imperfect crystals. But those that focus more aptly on the direction misnamed 'future' are the hard prismatic crystals. The small and resonant crystals of the early-day radio had part of this directional secret. The quartzes and natural rock crystals, the sphere-formed crystals, all real crystals can see quite clearly into the future direction. These sphere-formed rock crystals that are tuned to the historical future direction are known commercially as 'crystal balls'."

"Can patinas be peeled from anything besides stones?" a non-Pop asked.

"Yes, certainly," the speaker said. "Wood, as a short term storehouse of historical treasures (for no more than four or five centuries), is often superior to stone. Finished and furnished woods in particular will project these recalls at unexpected moments. These are the ghosts of the last seven centuries, the ghosts of old houses. And the term 'table talk' sometimes has the special meaning of talking tables. Planchette and ouija are dull forgeries of such talking tables, but they are made out of genuine remembering and projecting wood. And old tables become accepted members of old families. What child, playing under an old wooden table, has not heard old family secrets whispered by the familiar (which is to say 'long in the family') wood?"

"But still better, and more recording, than either stone or wood, for very short periods (a couple of decades), is undisturbed leaf mold."

"Hey, Duff, let's slip off for a while," a small group of young and talented members of the Royal Pop People propositioned Melchisedech Duffey. "They'll not miss you for the host for a while, and they'll not miss us either."

2

"The most dedicated rationalist, if he is honest, must admit that there are intervals that go against the grain, that go against reason. There are happenings, usually of quite short duration, that simply are not acceptable in the rationalist framework. I myself have experienced several such unaccountable if unbelievable intervals. Two were of such very short duration that they did not take up any discernable time; they were like flashes. Of the longer states, one was of three minutes, and one was of five minutes.

"And the Most Puzzling of them was for twenty-four hours."

[Absalom Stein. *Notes on the Argo Cycle*.]

"Quick thunder wounds the fatted town
That copiously bleeds:

And fruitless growths come tumbling down
And even human weeds."

[Finnegan. *Road Songs*.]

"Done" , said Duffey to the Younger Pop People. "I always said that if I could find a better place than mine or better company than my own, I would join it for as long as I was accepted. You look just like the young people who could show me wonders in my own town."

They were out of the buildings and into the streets. And right next to Duffey's establishments was Bayougoula Park, and it hadn't been there yesterday. Hell, it hadn't been there an hour ago. There had previously been some buildings there, but they wouldn't now be called to mind. Zabotski half-believed that the missing buildings had belonged to him, but he couldn't say for sure. Well, there was a new park there now. It was like a blessing.

"But it *isn't* a new park, Duffey," said Absalom Stein who had been pacing there in edgy thought. "I've just been checking the records, and it's been here for more than a hundred years. That's what the people at the park department tell me. There's something nervous about those people. They act like zombies, and they say things as though somebody were making them say them. And there's something contrived about the park itself."

"Don't look a gift colt in the mouth, Absalom," the hoyden told him.

"Or it'll crop you like a weed," the child hero said. "The thunder colts can crop the weeds that are too tough for the weed hackers to cut. Are you a tough one, Duffey?"

There couldn't ever have been more than two or three narrow buildings in that place, but the park was not narrow in any sense. It remembered all the things that a park should remember and it made room for them.

There were graceful benches made out of redwood, or perhaps out of red plum wood. There were tables and standing sideboards, and little barbecue ovens for the people to use. There were the big trees, live oaks, gum tupelos, royal walnuts, red cedar, pop elm trees. There were several dead and dying animals there, their flesh turning into rubber or plastic or styrofoam as they expired. There were several dead and dying people there also, but they lacked conviction and reality.

"Duffey, Duffey, help me," one of the dying people said. "I'm Moriarty. Help me."

"You look a bit like the Moriarty I knew," Duffey admitted, "but you look more like a bad joke than like a person. Young people, are the broken-up animals and the broken-up people on the same order?"

"Oh yes. The broken-up people often collapse into their own interiors when they die," the child-hero said. "But often they collapse into their animal totem forms first. So when one of the animals, or one of the persons, tells you that he is someone you used to know, he is probably telling you right. But you will notice that none of them has real flesh, except for a hunk here and there. Most such people were never real, not

authentic or meaningful. They are the first ones that the weed choppers chop down. We wonder that your city has kept so many of them so long. Every place else in the world has gotten rid of all of theirs several weeks ago."

There was a tumbling and noisy fountain in the middle of the park. It was full of green turtles and bull frogs, whistling blue fish, and carp. There were conches and oysters. There were alligators that would snap up alive any child or dog that came too near and had reactions too slow. The park policed its own. There were horned cattle there. And there were some of the crazy and splendid thunder colts.

But natural beauties are not enough for a park. It must have the amenities also. Some of the new pop persons had the amenities, but most of the old people were frightened and skittish and had no amenities at all. But then there came three old (and ever-new) people who were the amenities themselves: Mary Virginia Schaeffer, Margaret Stone and Salvation Sally. They came to see what was all this talk about there being a new park right around the corner from them. These were the ladies from the Pelican Press.

Also in the park, there were the inanimate or only partly animate amenities. There were arcades there, gazebos and kiboshes and kiosks, taverns and tabernacles and all other sorts of tents and pavilions. There were shops there, news-stands and confectioner's stands, open-air cafés, a little bandstand where some fellows drummed and tootled and tinkled.

"There is a sort of show being staged here," Mary Virginia said. This is 'Act Two, Scene 1', a Park. People coming and going. Remnants of people and animals dying. A fountain playing in the sun, laughter and pleasure everywhere. It is all contrived and set up. I like it, of course. I like almost all theatrical scenes. It has a bright and flashy face. I don't understand it, but I know that it isn't quite real."

"Yes, it *is* real," the child hero insisted. Really, it was time for the child hero to leave off being a child. He was old enough to be a man. "But many things that you thought were real, Mary Virginia, they aren't," he said. "You're wide open yourself, and it isn't so easy to change your apperceptions. And your town, here in its old and historic part, was never quite real. Haven't you ever seen the gaps in its reality?"

"Not very many gaps, not very big ones," Mary Virginia said. "It's all real except for these new morning parks, and you new morning people. Are you real, or will you melt away like the dew in another hour of sunlight?"

"We are real," the hoyden said. "it is the old people who are melting away in the sun. You can see remnants of them scattered around. We are real. You're still on trial."

"What do *you* think of these new-old parks and people, Duffey?" Mary Virginia asked.

"Oh, they represent the bright and shining obverse side of the Fortean coin or the Fortean universe," he said. "I've always known that the coin had two sides. The reverse, the best known side of the Fortean medallion, was always dingy and dim, poltergeistic and irregular, cheesy, aye, and

stupid. But this new side of it is fine and exciting. If things must be Fortean, let them be bright and shining Fortean. The parks are misplaced, of course. They do not belong here at all. But let us enjoy them."

"Forget about the morning parks," the child hero said. "We've told you that they're real. Think about this art of your town that is several hundred years old. Is it real, or has it always been a fraud? Will it stand the test of historical evidence? Have you ever wondered where the people got all that iron for the wrought iron work here? They were very prodigal with it. But this was a pretty primitive Louisiana at the time ascribed for the constructions... And the workmanship of the old iron balconies is no way primitive. It's decadent rather. But there was no iron available here. Hardly any stone; nothing except wood. It isn't real iron."

"Oh bedamned with this jabber!" Mary Virginia exploded. "It's real enough."

"Have you ever wondered where they got all the stones for the stone buildings?" the Countess asked. That countess was pert with many generations of pertness in her. She was quite young. Likely she was still a teenager. She had the easy cruelty of a member of a very old and very civilized family. "Really, there was never any stone on these mud flats, and there was not a quarry within sixteen hundred miles. The stones of these old buildings around here, they aren't real stones."

Mary Virginia and the others had to laugh at this line of nonsense that these Royal Pop People were pushing on them. All of them were drinking Shining Mountain Beer now. The brewery was right across the street from the park, but it hadn't been there yesterday. Or, if it had been, it had been passing itself off as some other kind of building.

"They've kept the taste," Margaret Stone said. "I recognize the taste. But maybe they've changed the name of it. Does anybody remember what the name of it was yesterday? Not Shining Mountain, no."

"There are two further proofs that your town is mostly unreal," the hoyden was saying. Zabotski joined them about then. He had a puzzled look, but he still felt that he was supposed to own the land that Bayougoula Park was reposing on. "Have you heard about the Black Sea Disasters?" he asked. He was wearing one of those new badges 'It's a question of your survival: are you splendid enough?'

"It has no mountains, and it almost hasn't any thunder," the hoyden was continuing despite the Zabotski interruption, "and these are two of the things by which the validity of a locale and a history can be checked. A place must have mountains and it must have thunder, or it isn't real."

"Certain tropic lands have no thunder at all," said the learned Stein who had arrived to the park and the party of them.

"Those same tropic lands have no history at all either," the hoyden said.

"Who is that very young man who looks so much like Finnegan?" Salvation Sally asked them as she pointed to a bugle-nosed young man who was coming dangerously close to the alligators in the fountain. "I'm spooked, I tell you. I thought that he was Finnegan indeed. I think it is his ghost."

"It does look like Finnegan, when he was a very young man," Duffey said. "He is the young painter who paints very like Finnegan in his orange period. Yes, he could almost be a younger ghost or fetch of Finnegan."

"Finnegan always did have a lot of fetches," Margaret Stone remembered.

"Mountains and thunder, they are the test," the hoyden was insisting. "Oh, the newness of mountains! Mountains are the most astonishing happenings in recent history. There weren't any mountains at all until quite recently. And we hadn't full dimensions on this world until they were raised up."

"What are you New Young Royal Pop girls talking about?" Melchisedech Duffey demanded. "There were always mountains. How would there not be mountains?"

"Duffey, you are so old that you *have to* remember when there weren't any mountains," the hoyden challenged. "Or maybe there was just one. But it wasn't a very high mountain, whatever you may have heard to the contrary. That's why there wasn't really very much water required for the water epic. It was all a flatlander world then."

"Are not all of you young people, the hoyden, the countess, are you not all in the big Horse Opera at the Street Opera House tonight?" Mary Virginia said. "The play bills have been up for a month, but I just recognized you as the people shown on them now."

"Why, of course," the young countess said. "We are the splendor and the interest of the horse opera. We are spectacular in it right up till the slaughter starts. Then we let other people be spectacular for a while."

"And this mountains-and-thunder nonsense that you're talking, that's part of the presentation, isn't it? This is just advertising talk, yes?"

"Come to the show, lady, come to the show," the child hero said. "The Horse Opera celebrates the wiping out of a last stronghold of the old and human way. It represents it, and it is it. But we will not tell it now. Come to the show. We give away lots of free things here, but we don't give away everything."

Black people of the town strode by wearing the new badges 'Are You Splendid Enough?' They looked more splendid than they usually did, but they also looked doubtful. Intercoastal Canal People were also wearing the badges, and splendid people they are not. There were other people of unspecified sorts, all trying to get behind the badges before it was too late.

The dying people and the dying animals were about gone. As the life left their members, their flesh turned into plastic or plywood or *papier-mâché*, and then they might be regarded as no more than leftover carnival debris.

"How does it happen?" Margaret Stone asked.

"They lost faith in themselves and in their flesh," the countess said. "That dragon there had the most faith. It was a human, and then it collapsed into the dragon totem as it died. Most of its flesh is turned now, but not all."

Margaret Stone bought a box of crackers at one of the kiboshes. She fed the crackers to the dying dragon. Most of the body of this biodegradable dragon had already been transmuted into *papier-mâché*. But some flesh remained.

"That one low mountain that they had at first was the Mountain of the Commandments," the hoyden said. "Notice the number ten in all of the versions. That meant that this god had ten fingers and ten toes. He was an anthropomorphic god. Had he been a god in the image of the splendid people, he would have given twelve commands for his twelve fingers. Had he been an abstract or transcendent god, then he would have given an abstract or transcendent number of commands.

"It was the same little mountain that they used in Greece both earlier and later. They played King-of-the-Mountain on it. They played Titans and Thunderguns. They played Giants and Jovians. They had small caliber thunder then, but none of the big stuff.

"Very often the people put rollers under the mountain and rolled it around to the different countries, since there was only the one little mountain in the world. The name of that first mountain was Ziggurat. It was a prefiguration of Ararat. Now there are more and more mountains. There's supposed to be a new one appearing this morning."

"What's the real story, guys?" Salvation Sally asked.

"Oh these Morning People, these Royal Pop People (we're all turning into them, you know, and I hate it) were around for a long time," Stein said, "and they were a nuisance. A demiurge put them all to sleep on a mountainside and told them that they must sleep till he called them with thunder of a certain tone. Then, a few millennia later, the demiurge forgot about that and used that tone of thunder for something else. The Royal Pop People woke up at the tone of the thunder (it was only the other day) and the first thing that they saw was the mountain they were on. They thought that the mountain was their mother and that they were thunder dimension people. That's all there was to it."

"Is it possible that you speak truth when you intend to joke?" the child hero cried. "We *are* the thunder dimension people. The mountain *is* our mother. It *was* only the other day that we woke up. We aren't fully awake yet, but we're in a fever to resolve it all. We're in a hurry to get rid of the flesh weeds and the remnants and see who are the thunder people and who are not."

An alligator was eating a little boy who had come too near to the fountain. The sight of this nauseated Mary Virginia, and indeed it wasn't a pleasant thing to watch.

"I know that it isn't real," she said, "but who is the illusion master who puts these things on? Is it possible that there is some meaning to it? Or is it just a piece of unfortunate clownishness?"

"Oh, the alligator eating the little boy is real enough," the child hero said. "And the little boy was real once. But then he failed it. That's the thing that will happen to at least half of you here present. You'll be found short, and you'll be destroyed. It's best for all. Some simple persons who have lost their shine will be eaten by the alligators here, and by other

creatures in other parks. Other people, a bit larger and older, will be destroyed by the fire drakes when the people prove to be inferior. And then there are certain bright and strong, but crookedly talented weeds. Even the flesh weed eater will not be able to do away with some of them. They must be destroyed by the thunder colts. Two will be working side by side at the harvest. And one will be taken and one will be left.

"But the little boy will be gone for good, just as soon as the — Yes, there goes the last bit of him down the gullet. And his puzzled parents will not even remember his name. Look at his mother there. She knows that she brought something or someone to the park with her, but she can't remember what or who it was."

"Come along Stein," Duffey said. "We're too close to it. Let's stand off from it a little ways where the dazzle won't be in our eyes. We can solve these puzzles. It comes to my mind that both of us are good at puzzles, and Zabotski here also. There's a group of master illusionists in town."

"I believe that they are a group of master disillusionists," Stein said. "They destroy the sustaining illusions of the people, and then they move in and take them over or demolish them. Yes, let us withdraw from their influence and take a good look at things."

"Goodbye, you men," Margaret Stone wished them on their way. "Be splendid!"

Duffey and Stein and Zabotski all went over to Stein's apartment. There was always a lot of high-class sanity at Stein's. The three men looked at each other. They laughed. They set themselves down to solve some doubtful happenings that had made a shambles of the morning and of the city.

"We all know that building after building after cluster of buildings cannot disappear overnight and be replaced by pleasant parks that are curiously stylized," Stein said. "We must now bring reason to bear. There is an illusion working in all of this, and we must see through it. They are all dislocated scenes that we have watched this morning. But they may be only halves of a binocular vision, and they may come into clear focus if we are able to find the other halves. These things are something like the aberration that I describe in my paper on..."

3

The revolt of the failing-apart people began about eleven o'clock in the morning. It hadn't a very strong basis as to tactics and strategy, but it had a lot of burning resentment banked up.

But the non-splendid people, the unrevolutionary old-line humans, had no good starting place. They were being assaulted from the inside and from the outside, and they could not come at their opponents at all. Most of the old-liners had awoken that morning feeling that they were afflicted with terminal diseases, diseases that would finish them off within short hours, that would rot them inside and turn them into trash.

Some leaders tried to come forward and tried to lead them, solid people with names like Callagy and Fitzherbert and Chastellain and Faucher and Panebianco and Cassady and Loubet. These were leaders who swore that they would not change and would not give up while they had a quart of blood or a pound of styrofoam left in them. But these leaders failed the old people in two ways.

Some of them did change greatly, in spite of their swearing that they would not. They changed greatly and suddenly, they ate fine bread and went over to the fine people, they became splendid and they joined the Splendid Royal Pop People. And may the green grass never grow on their fine graves!

And others of the leaders died the most withering deaths imaginable, and their dying came within minutes of their taking leadership. The trash death came so weirdly that it was as if the victim was shot in the paunch with an exploding shell. It seemed that this shell laid them open (they were quickly laid open, that's sure) and filled them with expanding trash that absorbed their entrails and turned them all into plastic and styrene and *papier-mâché* and pieces of all-purpose willy board. And so in their deaths they were derided by those they had tried to lead, since it was revealed that they were full of trash and had likely been full of trash all along. It was ridiculous that they should die of such ludicrous wounds (whether of internal or external origin); it was ridiculous that they should turn into trash. But how is such a thing to be battled?

Many of the stubborn old humans gathered together and holed up together in certain strong buildings, swearing that they would defend themselves and each other from all assaults, human, anti-human, pop-royal, bodily, phenomenal, mental, psycho, ghostly, Fortean, hellish, inexplicable, unholy.

They dug themselves in and formed strong pockets of people. They united their minds and resolves, so that the assaulting influences could not overpower them individually. So the pop people would hunt them out and break up their gatherings.

The hunting out of the holed-up old humans became good sport of the royal-pops and their recent recruits. Mary Virginia Schaeffer, Salvation Sally, and Margaret Stone joined in these exterminating hunts, though we'd have bet that they wouldn't. It came about this way:

These three persons of the female persuasion had gone around the park to Duffey's bijou, and through it to his auditorium. They believed this place of Duffey's to be one of the sources of confusion in the City. The Pop-Historical sessions were going great. The speaker now was Hugh de Turenne of Xavier College there in the City. Hugh seemed to be a genuine member of the Inner Royal Pop Historians. And he was speaking thus: "Yes, the Black Sea had been obliterated this morning, with all waters and shores of it, with all people and settings of it, and soon with all memories of it. After today we will never mention it again except to say 'What Black Sea?' if someone is so gauche as to mention it. Himself wanted it destroyed, and Himself wanted it to be completely forgotten. That this is done is a measure of the power of Himself. He wanted it obliterated

because he had been imprisoned on its shores, and he wished that distasteful episode to be expunged completely. And he wanted it obliterated because Colchis was on the Black Sea shore and had always been a bastion of strength of the Argo Forces. It was believed that some of the strength of The Argo, and of The Fleece, would go out of them if their geological base were destroyed.

"It now becomes the case that the Black Sea never existed, just as it becomes the case that several cities of renowned names — Athens, Jerusalem, Rome — never existed either."

"Be noetic," said one person who claimed the floor to speak for a moment, "but are you sure that those cities never existed?"

"Of course I'm sure of it," Hugh de T. said. "These were names in legend, and now they don't serve any further purpose so we won't use them. Oh, we are not fetish-ridden. The names may still be used in some connections. Black Sea Sturgeon may still be spoken of, though most of those sturgeon come from the Muk Muk Sea in Turkestan. 'Black Sea' brand is a little bit like 'Golden Mountain' brand, or some such. Persons do put what they consider to be catchy names on commercial products. Perhaps Cyrus Roundhead here, who is art expert on those old blinking-out legends, would like to say a few words on the disappearances."

"Ah yes," Cyrus Roundhead agreed, clicking a second and third lens into his monocle to give him enough distance vision to see across the room. "Be noetic, everybody! Ah yes, the Saga of the Sea that never was, the legend that took on a life of its own. Isostatic analysis had determined long ago that there had to be a fairly high land there, rather than a low sea. The world would have known the difference otherwise, by the difference of sectional weight, if there really had been a sea there. And people thought that they saw the sea, that they lived upon it and fished in it, that they sailed on it and had habitations and industries on its shore. But they were wrong. Now it is gone, and with its going, we are also rid of the legends of that great prison and its great prisoner, and also of Colchis and of the influential Golden Fleece which was supposed to be there."

"Oh plague, take the Black Sea and all its caviar!" shouted a non-pop man who wore a badge that read 'Ride it out: they've got to keep some of us'. "You are saying that Rome and Athens and Jerusalem do not exist? I'm aghast."

"It served the mordant humor of the Etruscans (who were a pop people) to bandy the name 'Roman' about," Cyrus said. "It referred to a destitute neighborhood of hillbillies who scratched out (literally) an existence in the hound dog hills above the Tiber swamps. But there was nothing there large enough to be called a town."

"But what of the famous name Roman emperors?" a man with a nose on him like the knobbiest Roman of them all asked. "They must have existed. They were too well-known to be made-up."

"Some of them were the names of music halls and vaudeville performers," Cyrus Roundhead said. "Some of them were the names of mascots of the army regiments. Some of them were nothing at all."

"What about Athens?" John the Greek shouted. He was the owner and operator of *John the Greek's Famous French Restaurant*. "I come from there. I lived there till I was thirteen years old."

"Ancient Greece was made up of a blasted inner core named 'Hellas' and five concentric rings about it named Aetolia, Thessaly, Epirus, Macedonia, and Thrace. The only part of it of any importance was Macedonia which was made up of strong and warlike men who, in consequence of their being strong and warlike, also became rich. Then, being not quite complete in their capabilities, they took one step backwards and became nouveau riche. So they decided to give themselves a culture, a portfolio of the growth arts, and a history. They had to make a past for themselves, and they had nothing but imagination to make it out of. So these prideful Macedonians created the legend of an old and heroic Greece. And they invented a fantasy city, Athens (the name is Atlantean originally), and they developed a fiction form of Athenian Romances and Athenian Novels. But there was never any Athens in Greece."

"How about Jerusalem then?" an unsatisfied person asked Roundhead.

"The name dates only to the first part of the present century or the last part of the previous one," Roundhead said. "The name was used in a promotional real estate venture by the Turks, but it never caught on except in fantasy. It was to be built near various ruined cities: the Jewish city Jebus, the Greek city Solyma, the Idumaeen city Hiero-Solyma or Holy Solyma, the Roman city Aelia Capitolina, the Syrian city Uris Lem, the Arabian city El Quds. But there was never any city named Jerusalem, except in the imagination. Bonds were sold to begin construction, but the builders went bankrupt before ever beginning it."

"But where were the Jews?" the now doubly unsatisfied person roared out.

"Oh, most of the Jews were in Babylon. They still are. Even today, you can dig down in the ruins of old Babylon and you will find the ruins of old Jews. But we will speak no more about the three imaginary cities. We will speak no more at all for right now. One hour of talking and then one hour of action is a good rule. Let us go out and see about the slaughter of non-splendid remnants. Weapons are available. Take what you wish."

So Mary Virginia, Salvation Sally, and Margaret Stone took weapons and went out into the city with splendid and semi-splendid persons. They took to the roofs and balconies and the iron ladders of the town. The young royal pop people were very agile, and the new pops from the city there kept up with them. All the newly splendid townspeople found a sudden competence and strength and speed in themselves. They found the thunder axe an easy weapon to master. They quickly learned the trick of hacking fraudulent persons and structures to death.

"This is illusion," Mary Virginia said to Margaret Stone and to Salvation Sally. "Just keep saying to yourself 'This is illusion'." If it hadn't been illusion, none of them would have been able to climb so wildly.

"Ah, we've finished with clearing out this building of its nothing people, have we not?" Cyrus Roundhead asked as they made their rounds.

"Child hero and myself cleared out the third floor," Salvation Sally announced. "The other floors should already have been taken care of."

"Then we remove the structure by deflation," Roundhead said. "We let the air out of the building, and we deflate it down to nothing. Do not be surprised, you who are on your first safari of this sort. There wasn't really any building here; there was only the illusion of one. There wasn't any iron. There wasn't any stone." The building was quickly deflated down to absolute trash, old cardboards and old papers. The wind blew the papers away, and with them it blew away all memories of the building. By and by, in a couple of hours, a park would begin to grow there.

Breaking up the faces and bodies of the pseudo-persons in the buildings was a queasy business. A little blood usually came out of them, but always more trash and fragments of plaster than blood. Some of the quasi-persons were even wearing those new 'Are You Splendid Enough?' badges, but the answer for them was 'No!' No, they weren't. They were not splendid enough, or they wouldn't have been fingered for obliteration.

"Some of them don't want to go," Mary Virginia cried from a crumbling building where she was deflating false people. "Some of them protest and they fight. Yes, and they bite like hell. If they never existed at all, where do they get the will to protest so violently when we put an end to their fictions?"

"You must insist that they go," said Roundhead, "or we will insist that *you* go in their places. It's fair that the persons having the least reality should go."

Yes, some few of the persons and creatures and effects that were being obliterated by the thunder axes and other weapons did not accept their obliteration willingly. They fought, though they had little to fight with. They hissed their hatreds. From looking like people they came to look like cur dogs and sick spirits. They were being dislocated from their pieces and forms. "It's *you* who are destroying our houses and our bodies," some of these un-creatures spit at Mary Virginia, and she could not tell whether they were cur dogs or snakes or persons.

"Why are we destroying these persons and things whose only fault is that they are unimportant?" Mary Virginia asked as she destroyed a half-grown lout or boy of the pseudo-people, the un-splendids.

"Why? Oh, because we *are* important and we must be intolerant of anything that is not," Roundhead said. "We destroy them because they seem to exist, and so seeming they dilute the whole worth of the world."

"Come, quickly, quickly!" the Countess was crying as she swooped down on them from an iron ladder out of the sky. "There are great numbers of pseudo-people, of human remnants, of morphy dragons, of *papier-mâché* fire lizards who have barricaded themselves in that building there. They say that they will resist forever. I never heard people make such a fuss about dying. Bring thunder axes, bring lightning rams. We'll route them out!"

Many meetings and conventions do not provide such interesting safaris for their folks as do the Royal Pop Historians.

Meanwhile, back in Stein's apartment:

"Whatever we do must accord with scientific methods and processes," Stein said.

"Always some of us (you and I, Stein, for example) have known that we were of the elite," Melchisedech Duffey was saying, "that we were special, that we were — well — splendid. And always others of us (Zabotski here, for instance) have known that they were not these things. But now it is presented to us, both inwardly and outwardly, that we have become two different species. Almost none of this presentation has been on a conscious level, but now it comes to a point where we must face it consciously."

"I don't understand you, Duffey. I said scientific methods and processes," Stein protested, "But not scientific-accepted content. That would be to bow too deeply to science. Much has been made about scientific content of subject matter, but it's all nonsense. 'Scientific' means simply 'knowing'. And one must knowingly handle the unknown as well as the known. We go into the unknown, which is to say, the unscientific, waters now."

"What you're saying, Absalom, is that you don't know what to think about these tacky things any more than anyone else does," Zabotski interrupted.

"No. I, we, don't know what to think about them, not yet. But perhaps we can know *how* to think about them. Let us see if we can make a working sketch of that 'how'."

"Balderdash!" Zabotski shouted. "I could set you straight, but I won't."

"It's true that we've changed," Duffey was saying. "We are not the same sort of people that our fathers (of which I had none) were. But have we changed so completely as to become a new species? Or were some of us always of a separate species? Yes, let us investigate this in the tradition of the great, free-wheeling, nontraditional scientists, from the viewpoint of an O'Connell or a Field or a Watson or a Spraggett."

"We have first to state our problem," Stein said. "What is our problem or question?"

"Our question, our eternal question," said Duffey, "is 'how does the world get along so well with so many things always going wrong with it?' A puzzler."

"You think that the world goes well?" Zabotski asked with a hang-jawed expression.

"It goes beautifully, man, beautifully!" Duffey beamed. "It somehow avoids being choked in its own trash and fatuity. Let us consider whether the strange things that have been happening in town today are part of what keeps the world running so well. Or does it run so amazingly well because there are so many of us amazing people in it? Let us ask this

fairly, as great scientists like Churchward and Pauwels and Senday and Allegro would ask it."

"Why not ask whether the strange happenings are happening at all," Zabotski asked. "Why not ask whether you are amazing at all, or whether you are overtaken by an attack of bilious euphoria. I could probably tell the answer if someone would ask me the question."

"Zabotski is right," Stein asserted. "Let's find out whether these things are really happening. I don't believe that they are. They're not plausible. How's about a large dragon turning into *papier-mâché* as he dies, and still able to eat crackers with his dying head? That's what the kid said was happening, the kid that just ducked in here for a minute, the kid that looks like Finnegan. These happenings are in the balance, but they're not fixed yet."

"I believe that all historical happenings must be chemically fixed like memory fixes. If they are not, then they haven't happened. Encountered phenomena are first recorded as electrical impulses in the brain. Then, after a few seconds or even minutes, they receive a chemical fix and they become permanently accessible memories. But if the recording does not receive the chemical fix, then it is forgotten. It will not be subject to any kind of recall at all. In such cases, it is more than metaphor to say that the event did not happen."

"So it may be with certain events that have been 'happening' in our city today. So it is with contingent events in every place every day. If the events turn out to be transitory, then they will escape instrumental notice as well as mental recording. There have been, for me, some very hazy unhappenings today. They fade, they weaken, they unhappen. Soon, possibly, they will be gone."

"They will not be gone before tonight's presentation at the Decatur Street Opera House," Zabotski stated. "Let them count the dead after that is over with. Then we may be able to say whether the things happened or not."

"It's like the poltergeist stuff, like the saucer-riding stuff, like the hairy-giant stuff," Duffey said. "A dozen times as many of such things are first observed as will go into permanent report or permanent memory. With many of them, it is the case that while they are happening at one end they are unhappening at the other. And if they finally come unhappened, then they become unremembered also. They are like daytime dreams, like skylarks, like walkabouts. It is only by accident that a person remembers one out of many such dreams when he is jarred back into awareness. But with the walking and talking daytime dreams, our imaginations are outside of our heads; just as they are all inside of our heads with the nighttime dream. If by accident we happen to remember one of our daytime dreams after we are jarred back to comparative awareness, then that thing will really have happened. And here is the point: it will have happened for everyone as well as for ourselves."

"But if we do not remember it, then it did not happen, not for ourselves, not for anybody. What then is the result when one person remembers it

clearly, and all others forget it completely? Or when one person forgets it clearly and all other persons remember it completely?"

"The result is group paranoia," Stein said. "It's common. And such splitting may be a common cause of it."

"But I will remember these things just out of orneriness," Zabotski said. "No one can persuade me to forget any part of them. I will drive the whole town bugs either way. If other people remember them, then the things have to have happened: and they will be enough to drive anybody bugs. If the other people do not remember them, I still will remember. This brings on the paranoia, and that is another name for bugs. I have you all either way. I do this because I am an ornery man."

"I wonder how many of these potential happenings are weighed in the happening balance every day?" Stein asked. "There may be dozens."

"There may be millions," Duffey said. "Any daytime dream of any person could become real and of actual occurrence, if it were sufficiently insisted upon. I believe that there are unbodied syndromes of possible events roaming the world like packs of dogs, looking for places to feed and live. And I believe that a particularly grotesque nexus of such unhappenings is trying to take up residence in our city today. Ah, how would all those great and swinging scientists think about this thing? How would Braden? How would Cayce? How would Velikovsky? How would Otto?"

"The syndrome has survived for some hours already. People at this moment are murdering other people by the hundreds in our town, and it is only because those other people are not splendid enough. It's like an euphoric dream in which one says 'I'm dreaming, it doesn't count, they're not real bodies, it isn't real blood'. But what if it is real? The new species, if we have become a new species in significant numbers, is essentially euphoric. I know that I've become euphoric beyond all reason. But is this horrifying stuff that is lurking behind the euphoric veil really happening? No, not yet. But, at this very moment, it's in the balance whether it will have happened or not."

"Easy, Duffey, easy!" Stein said. "You'll not give in, Zabotski?"

"I'll not give in. I'll remember it and I'll make it happen. I'll teach them to push things like that. And I'll be killed for it, and all of my sort will be killed. That's all right. What effect will it have on you when we are gone? A cramping knot in the middle of you that you can't untie, that's what will happen. Oh, you'll remember us all right. I always wanted to drive a whole town and a whole world bugs."

"Zabotski, if what we're thinking is correct, then some one person in this town, some deformed dreamer, did happen to have this obstreperous dream first. And he also had the obstreperous desire to make this dream come true, out of, out of plain —"

"Out of plain orneriness, Absalom, that's the word," Zabotski said.

"Zabotski couldn't have done it," Duffey insisted. "He hasn't enough imagination. He's a wan-wit. He's an old-remnant human."

"*Zabotski* could have done it!" Zabotski swore.

"Was that one person you?" Stein asked with spitting harshness. "Are *you* the deformed dreamer?"

"I'm the one," Zabotski maintained, "or I'm one of them. I have fun with it. The world-changers have been gnawing on the edges of the world like rats. I am helping to set out in bright daylight what has been lurking in their heads and intents. I kill a couple thousand people I don't like maybe. But no, the ones who will get killed are the ones I do like. No matter. It has to be done. The business has to be clarified. I draw a picture of the world and I ask 'Is this the way you want it?' All right, I'll fight against the vile thing, and I won't let it go and hide."

"There's a man up on Common Street who claims that *he* started it all," Finnegan said.

"Oh then, I suppose he did," Zabotski admitted. "But I got onto the idea pretty quick, and I joined it with quite a few others who wanted to see it dragged out into the open."

So that was that.

"I wonder why such a thing never happened before," Stein muttered.

"Take a look back through history," Melchisedech Duffey said. "Consider the hundreds and hundreds of things that couldn't possibly have happened, and yet they did happen. Even after the history has been edited and cleaned up and most carefully phrased, it remains that many of the unlikely things did happen. There have been deformed dreamers all over the place. Oh, how would all those tall and talented scientists think their way out of this one? How would Ouspensky think? How would Patten? How would Van Daniker or Ostrander? How would great Fort think about all of this?"

"Duffey, now that we are on strange things, just how old are you?" Stein asked. "(The question has come up several times lately.) The Thunder Colts recognize you as somebody very old. What is the answer? Is Zabotski here part of the answer?"

5

'...It is more of a hope than a promise. For four hundred years we have gone to the theatre in the hope of a worthy play, and it has not appeared: and we have gone without even an authoritative promise that it will come, as we have promises for the larger things like redemption and salvation. And yet no person can watch a curtain rise without the hope of great things. There is no art from which so much is expected after so many disappointments.'

[Patrick Stranahan. *Archipelago*.]

'And that twenty-four hour long, not-rationally-acceptable presentation comprised the last twenty-four hours that I spent in the old human context. How quickly we have forgotten that context! How quickly we have forgotten those who refused to forget it!'

[Absalom Stein. *Notes on the Argo Legend*.]

It's woe to tender fishes all
Who cannot stand the gaff,
And helpless folks who fail and fall,
Not splendid by a half.

[Finnegan. *Road Songs*.]

Mary Virginia Schaeffer was caught up in a horror and revulsion. She had killed a medium-sized child during the skylarking safari. Then came the abysmal doubt: 'What if this child was real?' It looked real. It bled scarlet stuff with the smell of blood. It did not turn into a poltergeist or an animal or a puppet as it died. It did not break down into piles of ashes or trash-barrel trash that would indicate (to a euphoric observer or effector) that it had been worthless or invalid from the beginning. The child still had warmth to it, and then it turned cold under her hand.

"It's as though one should play a hand of 'Lizzie Borden' with the playing cards," she allocated, "and then go home and find one's parents killed with an axe. It's is though I should jump rope to a child's chant:

'Boil my mother in a pot!

Turn the fire up, hot, hot, hot!'

—and then go home and find that my mother was indeed boiled to death. What devil's cards do I play with? Whose rope do I jump to anyhow?"

She carried the bloody child in her bosom as if it were it doll. She cried runny tears. But they were archaic tears from the old time when both the ocean and the human lacrimae were only half as salty as they later became. But had a newer and more saltless time come over the world quite recently?

"Whatever was the name of that hilarious delusion that we were just now caught up in so delightfully?" she asked blindly.

"The name of it was Hell," said somebody who was passing by. Why should she be shocked on hearing that? It was one of the older sort of people who said that, and they are likely to say anything.

"Stein, I have no idea how old I am," Duffey said. "And I don't see how Zabotski can be part of the answer. He belongs to some other groups. I used to know how old I was, on two different counts. I used to be well ordered in my sequences and my lives. That's all gone now. I used to remember my childhood and my early manhood clearly. Now once again, as it used to happen in my uncertain moments, I remember half a dozen childhoods for myself, and they all have the marks of my own fictions all over them. Now I remember half a dozen different young manhoods for myself. Am I really named 'Melchisedech, without father, without mother, having neither beginning of days nor end of life', as Paul writes about me in Hebrews? My name used to be Michael, once, in one of my versions. What is the advantage of being Melchisedech?"

"To be Melchisedech is to be a king," Stein said. "I don't know about your childhood, Duffey, but when I was a young boy, you were a grown man, and I considered you to be old. That was in Chicago, and it's likely the valid version. You remember me there. You remember others there."

"Yes, but Hans remembers me in the Northland in the same years," Duffey said, "and I remember him there. Vincent and Teresa remember me in St. Louis in those years, though it took a while for their memories to work. And I remember them. Henry and I mutually remember scenes in rural Louisiana, he a fat young boy, I a fat man. You eat the fat way in that Cajun Country. Mary Virginia Schaeffer remembers me in Galveston. And I remember her and her parents."

"I remember Duffey here in New Orleans," Finnegan said. "Dotty remembers him here too." There was something peculiar about Finnegan being there with them at this time.

"These are things that the different persons told me separately without telling the others," Duffey said, "and my own recollections come separately and disturbingly. Could I have lived so many lives at the same time?"

"Well, where do *you* remember Duffey from, Zabotski?" Stein sensed a rat.

"Wherever I want to remember him at, that's where I make him to have been," Zabotski said.

"How many pots do you have fingers in, Zabotski?" Stein asked.

"Yah. How many fingers do I got?" Zabotski held up his two big, Polish hands. But he dazzled his fingers, so there was no way that anyone could count them.

"Zabotski could have nothing to do with my simultaneous lives," Duffey said. "He is nothing. He is just a poor old-human person, non-noetic, non-splendid."

There were many gruesome happenings into the afternoon and through the day. There were battles and massacres. But it always ended up with more disintegrating trash in the streets and lots and shops. Then it was evening. It was near time to dress for dinner and for the presentation at the Decatur Street Opera House. That would be quite special. Of course they would have to go formal. It was that kind of thing. These men didn't go formal more than once a year. But what was going to be shown happened only once a world.

Duffey, of course, had every sort of evening clothes for rent over at his establishments. His 'Imperial Tuxedo Rentals and Gentlemanly Appointments' had always been a money maker. But the Royal Pop Historians ("Is there really such a group as the Royal Pop Historians?" Duffey had asked awhile before, "and of what *royaume* are they royal?") were still holding forth there, and Duffey didn't want, just now, to run athwart them.

Finnegan said that he would go and get the evening clothes for Duffey and Zabotski and himself (Stein, of course, had his own at hand), and he left to get them.

He was gone. Then the others looked at each other with clammy unease. They discovered that they couldn't remember how long Finnegan had been with them in Stein's apartment. And they didn't know why they hadn't remembered, until just now when he had walked out of the apartment, that Finnegan was supposed to be dead. So that couldn't have been Finnegan, however much like him he seemed.

"Zabotski!" Stein cried with a real threat in his voice. What could Zab have to do with this?

"Yes, I always liked Finnegan more than I liked you others," Zabotski said. "I keep dreaming all today that it will be good to have his company back. Then he is with us and I hardly notice that there's something oblique about it. I dream a lot of real stubborn dreams today."

When the man returned with the clothes, however, it was clear that he wasn't Finnegan. He was the young man whom Stein had dubbed 'Deutero-Finnegan'. He was the young painter around town, the young painter who sometimes left paintings on consignment at Duffey's place to see if they might not be sold. He was the young man who resembled Finnegan slightly, and whose best paintings were more than a little bit like Finnegan paintings from his orange period.

But he had spoken somehow as if he were Finnegan. And he had mentioned Dotty. Dotty had disappeared some years before this young man had been around there. There was surely something of Finnegan clinging to him. Finnegan haunted many people with his pervading presence. Could this be Finnegan's son? No. Finnegan had no sons in the flesh.

"We will have dinner before the opera," Duffey said. "Some of us won't be alive afterwards. The Presentation at the Decatur Street Opera House is billed as an Eschatological Drama. It will be the end of an affair, probably the end of the human affair.

"Have we any friends to go with us to a fine dinner at Girardeau's Irish Restaurant? Nobody does things so fine as does Girardeau lately, though he didn't used to be so grand. Have you noticed how grand all of us have become since, well, just these last few hours. Except Zabotski, of course. I mean it. Never have there been so many really grand people in the world, or in our city, before."

They walked in their grand get-ups through the streets. Trash men were loading their scoop trucks again and again with the debris. It was mostly broken effigies of people and animals that were being loaded into the trucks: polyvinyl bits, styrofoam bits, clay bits, plastic bits, paperboard bits, even fleshy and bloody bits. These latter showed signs of twitchy life. 'Duffey, Duffey, it's me. Alexi Ravel. Help me, help me,' one of the bloody bits said. Things like that were weird. And sometimes there were severed fleshy pieces mixed with the general trash — a leg, a head, a dripping loin that seemed to be of real flesh and vein and blood. The animal pieces also came from the destroyed people, it was said. Many

of these disappearing people pass through the animal form on their way back to clay and trash.

Duffey, Zabotski, Finnegan-not-Finnegan (the young painter, his real name was Jacob Soule), Mary Virginia, Margaret Stone, the Child Hero, Salvation Sally, the Urchin, the Countess, Absalom Stein, the Royal Pop Historian named Cyrus Roundhead, maybe some others. They were all together at that big, plush, oaken table at Girardeau's. This was the number one table in the front window. They were all splendid and supreme and superb. They were escharotic and noetic. They were mutated and metamorphosed and specified (is 'specify' not the word that means to change into a new species?): they were euphoric and willful and wonderful and transcendent.

"Only not all."

There was somebody who said "Only not all" , and this indicated that at least one of them would fail of splendor and would betray all the new and splendid things and fall back to the old dullness. Well, whoever it was, he would be done away with this night. "Just what is it that you Royal Pop Historians are doing to our town, Roundhead?" Stein asked him. "Mostly I like the effect, but I do have reservations." Things and attitudes were beginning to clarify themselves.

"Oh, we're making selective recordings of the last remnants of mankind, at the same time that we terminate those remnants," Roundhead told them. "The last pocket of humanity is here in your city. I say 'selective recordings' for this is very tricky. The records may not be as things originally were. They will be *as we say* that things were. Objectivity in these things is fine, when it is properly directed by ourselves."

Mary Virginia still had the broken body of the child with her, the last child that she had killed on safari. She wasn't making quite such a big thing of it now, but she wasn't quite ready to throw it away either.

"It's one of the *old* kind, Mary Virginia," the countess told her. "It isn't good for anything. Wouldn't be good for anything even if it were alive. You know what it is, don't you?"

"I know that it's human," Mary Virginia said. After a while, one of the waitresses took it from her to throw it on a trash truck. "It's not nice to have something like that at table," the waitress said. No, that's not accurate. Mary Virginia refused to give it to the waitress. Margaret Stone took it from her and said that she would have it thrown away.

But Margaret lied. She gave it to somebody to bury it.

"I just remembered that there isn't any Decatur Street Opera House in this city," Duffey said with a puzzled grin. "How do I know where it is then." But you're not supposed to puzzle too much when you're possessed by Euphoria.

"I just remembered that there isn't even any Decatur Street in this town," Mary Virginia Schaeffer said. But they were both wrong.

"Are we being elegant enough?" Margaret Stone asked. She asked it with a certain duplicity or irony or bitterness, some such things as the humans used to have in their speech, things that would soon be gone

out of all speech forever. Duplicity and irony and bitterness are things that simply have no place in splendid speech.

"Oh yes. You're in the clear. You're splendid and elegant enough, Margaret. You'll pass easily," the hoyden said.

Horse carriages were waiting in the streets outside. They had really elegant horses on some of those carriages. They were thunder colts who are part artifice, part legend, and part horse.

But inside, Girardeau's Irish Restaurant had become a work of living art. Transcendent persons are themselves works of art, and their transcendence flows from themselves to their groups, and from both to the surroundings. Any resulting arrangement must of necessity be perfect. Every person in this great dining hall was so seated as to contribute to the most striking composition of appearance and voice and aura. Every order that was served became a part of an olfactory and gustatory orchestration. Each gesture and nuance of the thousand diners (Girardeau's didn't used to be so large: only yesterday it could seat only forty-eight persons) was part of a living panorama and pandemonium. There was nothing accidental about the deeply textured and strong, musky scene. There would never be anything 'accidental' again. It was all a perfectly-fitted and balanced contrivance, ruthlessly beautiful... or horrible, depending on the sensibilities. The only ineptly clashing notes to be met there were provided by the several persons present who were lacking in the finer sensibilities. There were Zabotski and a few others. Bloody death be upon them!

But even the human remnants and preservations might be arranged and toyed with and enjoyed. They were interesting bric-a-brac in the now all-ways interesting world. But the human remnants could be much more handily arranged and enjoyed after they were dead.

"We are unable to account for the human interval," the man named Roundhead was saying. "It's like one of those flimsy visions that sometimes come to one in the moment of waking up, and that then vanish, with full wakefulness. I do not believe that any of us splendid people were ever human, and yet our bodies appear very similar to the human. But the body is related to the person and to the species only as the brain is related to the mind: it is a temporary place for it to live, that is all. It may be that both humans and ourselves moved into bodies that had been developed by a still more primitive species. Myself, I can live in a house of almost any shape. The body isn't important to me. The body and the brain cannot live without their visitors, the person and the mind. But the converse may not be true. I believe that a species may travel, like flame, through many bodies of various sorts: through that of the totem animal, through that of the contrived effigy, even through that burlesque thing that is called human."

"What is wrong with the human thing?" Zabotski flared up.

"Human mental processes are subject to error, and they are almost wholly lacking in true kinetic intuition," Roundhead explained. "Humans have the sickness of introspection and guilt. They have the sickness of depth, but sanity is always a surface phenomenon. They have the

sickness of awkwardness, and that is the most incurable sickness of them all. Thunder is the specific against most of these sicknesses, but who is it who prescribed it for us? Humans are crude and tedious and full of malodorous trash. Humans, Zabotski, are like you."

"What is special about Duffey here?" Stein asked. "I keep feeling that he had a foot in both of the worlds."

"So he did. So have you. There is no salvation for those who haven't it. But there's not much special about him," Roundhead said, "except that he is the oldest of us bright ones who are here present."

"You speak sometimes, Roundhead, as if you were all very old yourselves, and yet you speak as if you awoke very recently."

"Aye, so we did, but from an ancient sleep," Roundhead said. "And we found that, as in the case of bears, many of us cubs were born during that sleep. I don't know whether I'm new born or new awakened."

"And what is, all, unspecial, about Zabotski here?" Stein asked.

"Oddly enough, Zabotski has been invaluable to us since we have been in this city," Roundhead said. "He's so *damned* human! He spots the old humans for us, dozens and dozens of them. He leads us right to them. Ah, as soon as we clear out this city, then the old humans will be gone forever, except for the very few who escape us for a while. But we will track them all down and sink them. The human ship will be the one that left no wake."

"Nothing at all to be left?" Stein asked. "Not even the echo of an empty vain?"

"Nothing it all left?" Margaret asked. "Not even the perfume of an empty vase?"

"Nothing it all left?" Deutero-Finnegan asked. "Not even the guffaw of an empty gag?"

Margaret herself, who seldom wore such deceptions, was wearing the perfume named 'The Last Night of Her Life'. She also wore a sullenness that was unusual for her. "No wake, no remnant, no impact, no influence, we will have none of these from the human thing," Roundhead stated resolutely. "We eradicate the thing completely."

"How chorasmian of us!" the Countess exclaimed.

"I think there will be a legacy," Zabotski said sullenly. "I think that I will be a part of it."

"So will I be," slid Deutero-Finnegan, the young painter who had some of the memories and aspects of Finnegan clinging to him.

"Was humanity really a species apart from us?" Roundhead talked to the tableful and to himself. "Or was it a disease that afflicted the world for a little while? Possibly it was both, a double, donkey-headed monstrosity. But now it will not be either. When we arrange the human things, in their histories, even in their possible influence on ourselves, we will arrange them in our own ways. We will arrange that they drop into the bottomless void from whence there is no echo."

Time was running apace. The people began to enter their horse carriages to travel to the opera.

There *was* a Decatur Street in that city, though there hadn't been before. It had used to be called Magazine Street, or perhaps Peters Street. It was fed into by the Grand Concourse through which a thousand horse carriages came without crowding. There *was* a Decatur Street Opera House in that city, one of the memorable opera houses of the world, though the people there who had been living in New Orleans didn't remember it being there before. It had a great façade of laughing stone. The special stones set in that façade recorded the flood tide of arrivals at the Opera. Everything was of a stylized splendor under the jeweled night sky, and the splendid people dismounted and went grandly in.

"Only not all."

Somebody said "Only not all" because there were tests that would winnow out a few of those who sought entrance. There were tests to discern the stubborn old humanness of people going in. Perhaps a dozen out of every thousand seeking entrance were flagged out by the Kinetic Intuition Indicators. These flagged-out persons were made to wash their hands in ashes. If they were human persons they would be washing their hands in flame. And several persons came there of their own will without being compelled by the Kinetic Intention Indicator.

Of those first ones who took the test, they failed it every one of them. They failed it in dirty flames and curling smoke.

Zabotski, of course! It didn't take the Indicators to spot him. He was flagged out by everybody's intuition. He was unregenerate, old-line human, and this was apparent to everybody. He was stubborn and unchanging, devoid of easy euphoria, devoid of intuition, empty of transcendence, and of cloggy depths.

The ashes of the tests were in large, bronze basins. They were recent human ashes, of that very day. They were the strong-smell ashes of newly burned and very stubborn flesh, of flesh that refused to break down into trash and trifles as it died. These test ashes were really a little bit special, if anything of the relieved human can be called special.

Zabotski rolled his hands in the deadly ashes. And the ashes burst into stifling and reeking flames. Old human flesh recognized other old human flesh. Zabotski, from the pain of the flame, gave out with a horrible, wrenching sound that was both a moan and a laugh.

There was a blood roar against this Zabotski from all the bright people entering the Opera. It had been known that Zabotski was unrepentantly human, but the pleasure of catching him was not dulled by its being expected. Zabotski was big and wild and loud and silly, and there was a lot of blood and fun to be got out of him. Powerful men put a halter over his head, a bit in his mouth, and a rope around his neck. They begin to lead him off, into the Opera House by the animal entrance.

"I'll leave me a wake behind me!" Zabotski roared (it was a deformed half-animal roar, for the mouth bit had a tongue spike in it). "I will strew me a path in this world and out of the door of this world! I will make me be remembered!" He did strew a pretty wide path made out of half a dozen felled strong men. But he was only back into his youth for one furious moment there. He was too old and too fat, and he was overpowered again and dragged away. But he left a stenchy wake from the smell of his burnt and broke-open hands, human stenchy.

Well, what was there in human ashes that would still kindle fire at the touch of kindred flesh? There was something in the ashes that remembered.

Then, a short moment after Zabotski had been dragged along, there was an out-of-order incident, a happening that was not anticipated at all. A person came out of the crowd to the total consternation of all the intuitive people. This was a slight, quick, powerful young man, with a big nose and with sudden moves. He was certified splendid and noetic. He was an intuitive, with-it person. This young man had been a puzzle around town to various sorts of people. He had been a puzzle even around the Walk-In Art Bijou and the Pelican Press. Stein had called him Deutero-Finnegan because of his supposed resemblance to dead Finnegan and because of the real resemblance of his paintings to those of Finnegan. This man was not compelled either by the intuitions of the crowd or by those of the Instruments to declare himself. But he did. He left the concourse of the people entering the Opera House, and he went to one of the large, bronze basins that held cold human ashes.

"This is a mistake," one of the Marshals of the Opera said to him. "You are not suspect. You have not been questioned at all."

"This is no mistake," the Deutero-Finnegan said. Then he declared himself by putting his hands deep into the ashes. They flamed to his touch. But it was not the black-red, reeking flame that had been the case with Zabotski. It was a paler flame, yellow at first, then deepening a bit and shifting to orange color.

"You can withdraw from this," the Marshal of the Opera said. "This is some sort of a technical error. We all know that you're not human, that you are one of us. We know that you're new and splendid and sane. Why do you young men like to be eccentrics? You are causing a false flame for an antic. It isn't even the right color of flame. Why do you love the extravagant gestures?"

"I won't withdraw," the young fellow, the Finnegan Image said. Then his face crumbled and broke with the realization of the flame of his burning hands. "I *am* human if I *die* to be human," he shuddered the words out. "Where I am unhuman, it is not in your direction." He staggered, and he watched the flames on his hands.

"No, it's not quite the right color," he said. The color deepened a bit when the flesh began to support the flame. "Still not quite the right color," the young man croaked as he watched the flame turning to a richer orange. "I'll have to work on that color." Strong men put a rope

about the young painter's neck, and they led him into the opera house by the animal entrance. But they didn't inflict the bridle or bit on him.

Seconds later, there was another out-of-order incident, one still less anticipated than the episode of the Double Finnegan. But who was the person who broke out of the concourse and ran towards one of the oracular ash pots?

"Come along inside," Duffey was insisting to his party with curious haste. "Come, Sally. Come, Mary Virginia. The show is inside, not here."

"Wait, I want to see who it is," Salvation Sally protested being hurried.

"Inside, inside," Stein was insisting with false heartiness. "We are supposed to have some excellent prelude music tonight. We don't want to miss it."

"I'll not be rushed," Mary Virginia objected strongly. "Where's Margaret?"

But the small party was swept inside by the concourse of people. Of course the prelude music was excellent. There was the *Painted Thunder Suite* by Kandarsky. The Countess and the Child Hero left the party. "We're in the bullfight sequence, you know," they said.

There was the *Shining Mountain Fugue* by Palfrey. The Hoyden left the party. "I'm in the Thunder Cold Games, you know," she said.

"Where is Margaret Stone?" Mary Virginia asked again.

"She must have gotten lost in the crowd," Salvation Sally said.

"Nobody could lose Margaret, not anywhere, not ever," Mary Virginia objected.

One does not come to the Opera House to hear excellent prelude music, nor to wait overlong for the curtain to rise. It is all right to wait just long enough for anticipation to peak, yes, but then...

...but then the curtain didn't rise at all in the Decatur Street Opera House that night. Instead of rising...

But Margaret Stone hadn't entered the Opera building with her party. She hadn't gone in with the press of people. Instead of that, she became the least expected episode of the evening. She was the second of the out-of-order persons who went to the oracular ash pot.

She put her hands deeply into the human ashes, but these ashes were cold and grainy and dead and remained so. So then, of course, Margaret was not old and unregenerate human. She belonged with the splendids and noetics. But wait!

She flicked her tongue. She often did this before making a sparky statement. She flicked her tongue again, and there was genuine holy ghost fire flying about it. She scooped up the ashes in her tangled and tense and electric fingers, and put them into her mouth. They flamed.

Then she cascaded handful of flame over her head and face and arms, and she seemed unburnt by them. They were garish, tumbling, orange flames.

"Oh, that is the right color!" the Deutero-Finnegan said as he watched from the animal entrance of the opera house. "Perfect, perfect."

"You can withdraw from this childish prank," the Marshal of the Opera told Margaret. "You are not human. You have not been charged with any offense. We know that you are splendid, that you are noetic, that you are intuitive. This is false fire you have made here for a joke. Why do so many of the genuine people insist on flamboyant gestures? Withdraw from this insane thing! Be splendid!"

"I will not withdraw from it," Margaret said. "I will be human in death at least. It is not false flame. It is true flame. Sure I'm splendid. I will be splendid in flame."

They put a rope around her neck to lead her away. But she turned it into a rope of fire and drove all her oppressors back. Then she moved of herself, with that quick dancing step that she used, into the animal entrance of the building.

Instead of going up, the Opera House curtain was sundered to nothing. It was struck by lightning. It was burst and rent by a simultaneous thunder stroke. It was in flames, and then it was gone. The Decatur Street Opera House was the only place in town that employed this effect.

The scene was a blood-and-sand arena. The act was a bullfight. It wasn't a Spanish thing. It was the earlier Cretan Bull Drama. The music was the heavy *Bull Waltz*. The Countess, the Child Hero, and nine other young persons leapt over the bulls, vaulted on their horns, curvetted clear over them, escaping the horns, escaping the hooves. This was all a beautiful action. The young people had their waists drawn very small by bronze cinctures.

Each of the young persons would defy a bull and do a flying handstand on its horns. Then there would be an interval when the bull was given a human person to mangle and maul to death. The humans were sliced and gored by the curving, whetted horns, and they were trampled and torn open by the thunder hooves. They were broken to pieces by the violent bull impact. In their being broken open, the humans spewed out some blood, much entrail, and still more trash.

"It is because we who order their deaths are so intuitive that we force them to reveal their inner essence," said Cyrus Roundhead who was in the loge with the Duffey party, "and the inner essence of humans is always trash. Ourselves, who have no inner essence and who are entirely and splendidly on the surface, contain no trash at all."

Zabotski was one of the humans to be killed by the bulls. He made a good show. He gave the bull back bellow for bellow. He pawed the sand in mimicry of the bull. He put down his own head to meet the impact. He was dislocated and smashed and broken open, and he died in his own blood and serum and trash. He did, however, give one more defiant bellow after he was dead, a thing that startled the spectators. He got what is called 'The Ugly Ovation', that given to things that the splendid people hate but also admire.

"What we must do is create a cycle of heroic memories of ourselves as a species," Cyrus Roundhead was saying. "Likely we must borrow or adapt such material. But wherever will we discover any heroic material to

adapt? If only we could acquire it by legacy from some other species. Do any of you know of a heroic species?"

After some minutes, the arena scene was that of bears and *retiarii* or net wielders. The little young people in this act tangled the rushing and maddened bears in their flung nets, took them off their feet with the force of their own rushes, rolled them like huge and angry balls, scorched and burned them with white-hot prods. Then they had mad bears indeed.

"Is not the music exquisite?" Roundhead asked proudly, for he was himself one of the marshals of the opera. "It's the *Bear Ballet* by Brhzhlozh."

"Brhzhlozh is only a machine," Mary Virginia said sourly.

"Certainly," Roundhead answered. "He is an intuitive, music-writing machine. There was once some slight talk of keeping a few unmutated humans to compose our music for us, but the best opinion was to extirpate every human vestige and to make no exceptions. We ourselves are not humans by chromosomic count or by blood type or brainwave pattern. We are not humans by passion or estrogen or adrenaline (for we have none of these things in us at all). We are not humans by mental process or by esthesia. We are forever rid of the human connection. And so are you our recruits, though you may once have believed yourselves to be human. We are the splendid persons, the final persons."

"We sit at Opera, and Opera was a human thing," Stein said.

"Not such blood opera, no," Roundhead contradicted. "It is all our own, both in its new form and in its ancient antecedents."

The maddened bears were slashed out of their entangling nets by the young and splendid net people. They escaped the on-rushes of the released beasts. Then human persons were thrown into the arena in the way of the bears. And these humans were broken up and killed in a series of noisy crunchings.

Then there was the Fire-Drake Frolic in which a few more stubborn humans were slain. Fritz's *Fandango in Three Flames* was the accompanying music.

The Interlude came then. There was interlude music by Mrzorca, and Shining Mountain Bubbly was served to all the loge patrons.

"Opera used to be better," Mary Virginia said. "Operas were more fun a few years ago, when we were still human."

"None of us was ever a human," Cyrus Roundhead corrected. "Some of us may have thought that we were. Some of us may have been raised by humans, just as humans had the tradition of human children sometimes raised by animals."

Time flowed by on its smooth and easy surface. Time stood still in its depth. But the new simultaneity had no depth. Then the gracious and rather stylized interlude scenery was cleared away. The presentation of the climax piece of the night would now begin. It was the Thunder Colt

Game. It was orchestrated to the *Thunder Torus* music. The live and pantomimic game unfolded.

"When we persons of the thunder dimension attained consciousness, it was a sudden event that instantly overtook every person of us," Roundhead of the splendid mouth was saying. "The world was already in the middle of its baroque phase when we woke to consciousness. The humans have claimed a sort of consciousness, but they cannot mean the same thing by it. I believe that our own wakening to full consciousness is quite recent. Watch now! The awakening of life of our own totem animal, the Thunder Colt, is the symbol of our awakening. Notice that it devours compulsively on awakening. So do we."

There was a large thunder colt egg in the arena. The Hoyden and other young people broke a window into the egg. They took a human person, alive and blaring, and thrust him through the window hole into the egg. Then there was a mindless gnashing and crunching as the still-unconscious thunder colt inside the egg began to devour the human. With the nourishment, there came a fulgence from within the egg. It was not yet consciousness. It was only inquiry.

Lightning answered the inquiry, struck the egg, and shattered it open. The thunder colt stood up on uncertain and stilted legs. That was the awakening to consciousness.

Simultaneous thunder struck and suffused the colt. That was the awakening to the thunder dimensions. Then the splendid thunder colt, some pieces of the eaten human still protruding from its mouth, leapt clear of its birthing debris and ran riot. The stark music of the *Thunder Torus* picked up the tempo as the game evolved.

There were only two human persons remaining in the arena. These two were known to be noetic and splendid. They were humans only in their coming deaths and in their depths as persons.

The thunder colt knocked the Deutero-Finnegan down with its first assault. It tore off his lower jaw, split his chest, and seemed to lay open layer after layer of person in turbulent and confused depth.

"We have the thunder dimensions," the talkative Cyrus Roundhead was saying, in the loge, "but I am jealous that there may be other dimensions that we lack. Do we really miss anything by living so entirely on the surface? What we need to find for ourselves is a dimension of depth. It would be fine if some older and kinder race would give such a dimension to us, but we look in vain for a source of such an inheritance."

The joyous, newly-awakened, totem thunder colt killed the Finnegan effigy on the second pass, splitting him open in an incredibly rich and mingled juiciness. There was spilled out shouting scarlet blood, crimson blood, high saturation sulphur-colored blood, saffron-colored blood, flame blood, ichor and serum mezcylanza. The color was more orange than red and thick now. That color... it was the life garish orange color of all strange artists in their orange period.

"Why, he had the right color in him after all," Margaret Stone laughed. It was almost her last joke.

“As a species, we should try to create a signature color for ourselves,” Roundhead was saying in the loge, “as well as a depth and an intensity. Can we remain splendid forever if we do not add to our repertoire? We'll pick garbage out of the wake of any great people who'd gone before us, but where shall we find traces of a great people? We search vainly for a legacy of glory.”

The thunder colt wheeled back and killed Margaret Stone at a single pass. It tore off half of her head with its totemic teeth. It tore out her throat. But it couldn't go deeply enough to get the laugh in her throat. That's all she had to leave.

The Thunder Torus music crashed to an end. Outside the Opera House, the new and unlegacied breeze was blowing under the gimcrack, jeweled sky.

Book Twelve

“You, Melchisedech pathetic,
Not descending, not beget-ic,
Duff, you'd better be noetic.
[— *Crissie Cristofero.*]

“How chorasmian of us!” Becky Stein cried, and she grinned at Duffey.

“What, Countess?” Duffey asked her.

“How noetic of us!” Cleo Mahoney cried, and she smiled proudly.

“What, Hoyden?” Duffey asked. “What are you children going on about?”

“We have strengthened the ‘Fifth Road’ part in the play,” Cleo Mahoney said. “You know, that's the one where Crissie had the introductory verse:

‘A shattered world, and an end to fuss.

A new folk comes. And it isn't us.’

We have made the ‘Fifth Alternative’ rather more important and more powerful, and we will give you your new lines that you say in it. But you have already called us ‘Countess’ and ‘Hoyden’, and those are the roles that the two of us play in the ‘Fifth Road’ part of the play. You're amazing. How do you do it? Here is the script with your new lines. Here, read them. I hope you learn them as wonderfully fast as you learned the others.”

“All right,” Duffey said, “I'll read them. But didn't we already put the play on the night before last?”

"No, no, of course not," Becky said. "You are exasperating. Sometimes you catch onto things so quickly that it amazes me. And sometimes you are so slow and confused. That was the rehearsal, but you didn't even come to it, and I had to read your lines. The play is tomorrow night. There's been no change in the date of it."

"Oh, that's... well, that's reassuring, I guess," Duffey said. He looked at the script with the revised more important and more powerful 'Fifth Alternative' part. And he tried to orient himself at the same time.

Duffey had been in a place and with people who were too fast for him. Things had been happening there that were beyond all reason, and he had been accepting them as though he were hypnotized. With the 'too fast' people, Duffey had sinned in pride and superbity, and he had leagued himself with those people who were, for all he knew, no more than splendid devils.

Then he had attempted to withdraw from the situation to clarify his mind. He had called on all his magic and trickery. He had reminded himself that he had a qualified lordship over time and place. When younger, he had had the power of moving back and forth through time easily, the power of backing out of a time that had gone wrong and taking another alternative forward then. As he got older it became a little harder for him to do this, but it should still be possible in an extremity. He attempted it; he challenged it. And it began to move. But now he had to tear across acres and acres of fabric to back out of the situation, and there were living people imbedded in that fabric.

Duffey, having just come out of a shocking and splendid Opera House, trembling yet at the magnitude and splendor and outrage of what he has seen and heard, had been standing under a gimcrack, jeweled, night-time sky in a splendid devildom. But the devildom was wearing the false face of his own city New Orleans. He had marshaled all his

power to break out of it. Then he lost his bearings and his consciousness.

Then, after a while, or before a while, he had come to himself in a pleasant place, and there were several teenage girls with him, girls whose names he would remember after a bit.

"A totem animal plays a bit part in that 'Fifth Road Alternative'," Cleo Mahoney was saying. "We have given it the tentative name of the 'Clattering Pony'."

"The Thunder Colt," Duffey said.

"Oh, that's better," Becky Stein cried. "You've hit it right, Duff. The Thunder Colt it will be."

This pleasant place, in fact, was a teenage milk bar and ice cream restaurant, and Duffey was attacking a Golden Gate Sundae. He suspected that Becky Stein, who was chubby, had suggested it to him.

So Duffey was back out of the bright devildom (otherwise known as the 'Fifth Contingency' or the 'Fifth Road'), but had he brought anything back with him? He hadn't liked that sound and feel of tearing fabric as he had returned. He had done violence to time and to the people living in it. How badly had he torn the fabric of the two worlds? Had he injured people, or even killed them?

"They say that you can do magic tricks, Mr. Duffey," Crissie Cristoforo said. "Would you do some of them during the intermission? That would be better than your playing your banjo, I believe, or even playing your recorder flute. A touch of magic is what our play needs, at the intermission, right before the sequence where there has *got* to be a belief in magic."

"I don't do magic tricks," Duffey said. "But I do magic. It's nearly as effective."

"If it weren't for working on the play now, I think I'd go crazy," Becky Stein was saying. "Aunt Margaret's sudden death tore me up so much! She's the only one of you

Romans I ever loved, except you now, Duff. And to be killed by a rabid horse! Whoever heard of a rabid horse before?"

Duffey was sick. Margaret Stone (for Margaret was a sort of aunt of Rebeka Stein) had been killed by a horse. Duffey had brought at least part of the Fifth Alternative back with him.

"And the funeral mass, Duffey, what have they done to it?" Becky moaned. "They've ruined it. I made a Crissie verse about it:

'Ain't we glad that she is dead!

All be happy! Don't be sad!'

All I can say is that the new funeral mass sure is in bad taste at a funeral. It cloy, it cloy! What's the matter with you Romans anyhow? I wish Aunt Margaret were back so she could make a Gadarene Swine verse about her own funeral. You people don't believe *that* mass is inspired, do you?"

"The Holy Ghost has bad days, even as I and thou, Becky," Duffey said miserably, "I tell you now though that there are dangerous things in that 'Road Five' of the play."

"Are there ever!" Cleo Mahoney cried in shocked delight. "It is all so horrible and so murderous and so splendid. I pray that it may never happen in the real world. And, as a codicil to my prayer, I pray that if it does happen, I want to have a front place where I can see and take part in everything. I wouldn't miss it for the world! But it *is* the world, and which way it will roll, that's the subject matter of that 'Fifth Contingency'."

"What are you going to do with the Jacob Soule pictures now that he is dead, Mr. Duffey?" Crissie Cristofero asked him. "There's one of his that you have over at your Walk-In Art Bijou that I just love. I'd give anything I have in the world for it, but everything I have in the world is just a little over nineteen dollars."

"I don't know what I'll do with them, Crissie," Duffey said. "There will probably be an administrator appointed for his estate. I never knew many details about him, whether he

has any kindred or not. He comes and goes, just like Finnegan did, ah—just like another painter did.”

Duffey was trembling. Margaret Stone killed by a rapid horse and already buried! Jacob Soule, the Deutero-Finnegan also dead! The ripped fabric of Duffey's coming back from the splendid Devildom had displaced events and people, in time and in space. And Duffey had brought at least two deaths back with him.

How about Zabotski! Zab had also been killed in the Devildom.

“Have any of you—I'm almost afraid to ask this—seen Zabotski lately?” Duff asked the young girls. “I—ah—wonder if he is all right.”

“I haven't seen him,” Becky said, “and the others wouldn't know him. Duffey, I'm worried about my father. He's grown grand and splendid lately, and he's using it for all it's worth. He's signed to do a series of reviews for '*Gentleman Rounder*', and that's the magazine with the built-in sneer for the common people. “Abba Absalom really believes that he's become superior to the common crowd. ‘Really, those of us who are truly aware, we form a species quite apart from the commoners,’ he said. ‘It's no use pretending that we don't.’ Really, he's impossible.”

“It is a phase that a middle-aged man sometimes pass through,” Duffey said. “I hope that it will pass.” So Stein was back from the Devildom, but he had brought some of its baggage with him. What, Absalom grand and splendid! Well perhaps he had always been, but he should not be aware of it in himself.

Duffey took the script for the play with him and left the girls and went over to Zabotski's old place. This was the first look he had had of his city since his return from his ‘Fifth Road’ excursion. When he had returned to awareness he had already been in conversation with the girls. The city looked pretty much as it always had, and yet Duffey looked at it with a jaundiced eye. The jaundiced eye was one of the

things he had brought back from his mingling with the splendid people.

At least the Bayougoula Park was no longer there, as it had been there in the Fifth Contingency. And some of Zabotski's buildings were back there again, as they had not been there in the Contingency.

"Is Zabotski around the place?" Duffey asked a fellow who rented from Zab in one of the apartment buildings. "I'm almost afraid to ask."

"He just left," said the renter (his name was Alexi Ravel). "He just came by to collect the rents. That's all he comes by for now. He spends all his time on the lake in that big, freakish boat with Wife Waldo and all the kids and animals. He says that when catastrophe strikes, they'll have a better chance than most of riding it out."

"Ah, does Zab seem to be all right?"

"All right? No, of course not, Duffey. When was he ever all right? He's as nutty as Pecan Prairie. By the way, I'm more than a bit angry with you, Duff. I had a dream that I was dying and that you passed me by and let me die. I wouldn't have done that to you. I'd have tried to save you."

"But Alexi, if it was only a dream—" Duffey tried to defend himself with hand-flopping gestures. But he did remember the incident. That bit of trash that had seemed to call to him, it had been Alexi Revel in mortal agony. Duffey hadn't stopped because it would be an unsplendid thing to notice a pile of trash. But now he was ashamed.

"No, it was only *only* a dream, Duffey," Ravel said bitingly. "I don't know what it was, but you knew it was me in it. You left me there to die, and I wouldn't have done that to a dog."

Alexi Ravel turned away from Duffey, spat on the sidewalk in disgust, and went into the Zabotski-owned apartment building where he lived.

Well anyhow, Zabotski was back in the well-a-day world, in as much as he had ever been in it. And his watertight contraption, the large boat or barge, was apparently back

also. In the world of the splendid Devildom, Zabotski hadn't seemed to remember anything about building the boat.

Duffey went into his own place that was quite near (Bayougoula Park was no longer between his place and Zabotski's buildings). He saw by his automatic clock that it was Monday, a Monday that he had lived once before. The Monday and Tuesday and Wednesday of that week he had already lived once, before he found himself in the situation of the Fifth Case.

It being Monday, there was a letter from his quasi-brother Bagby. It was not, however, the same Bagby letter that had been there the previous time that Duffey had lived this Monday.

"My dear brother and most egregious ass," the letter began. "It is with disgust verging on loathing that I view some of your recent conduct. An ordinary person, not very smart, might have been taken in by some of the pretensions of the Royal Pop People, for a very little while. But you, who are supposed to be an extraordinary person, were taken in by them all one day and far into the hellish night. You are supposed to be better than that. You have proved yourself, in this, to be a cad and a coward and a crawler, a total goof, and not at all manly. But you could just as well have been a good man in the episode. You have the equipment to be so.

"For a little pride, you denied your people, and you went with the Royal Freaks. And now you have withdrawn from it, though not till the twenty-third hour. That much is good. But you have not withdrawn from it in all ways clean.

"Now you must go into the wilderness and gather your strength. If you cannot gather it now, under disadvantaged conditions and beset with obstacles, then you will never be able to gather it at all. Wherever you go, whatever you do, for a while, it will be a wilderness where you are. You will make your own wilderness. And you will be an old bear in the woods of it.

"Ah well, we bet on you here. We bet clay coins that we make ourselves, for we use no other money here. Because of your peculiar attributes and circumstances, many persons are watching how it will go with you, and I am watching also. 'He cannot die,' some people say 'or at least he cannot have an end.' So, what will happen to you? There are several theories about this, and we bet on them."

"But I *have* died," Duffey told himself and Bagby if he could hear him, "and I have my ashes somewhere to prove it. Do not say that I can't die. I will have no end, it says? It seems, at the moment, that I will have no end in the sense that I will have no purpose. I hope that is not the true case of it."

"My brother, be a little more steadfast in your unique career. It is absolutely necessary that you should be. It only *begins* to get rough for you so far."

Oh, it was nice to have one faithful correspondent like this stepbrother Bagby.

Duffey was walking through that part of his wilderness that is called Dumaine Street. That sign "The Future Begins Right Here" was still standing in the pedestrian way. It must have been some time since Crissie Cristoforo had first painted it. Its paint must long since be dry. The message of it was really directed to Duffey personally, which may have been the reason that he seemed to be the only one who noticed it.

The sign stood in the pedestrian way, but it wasn't an obstacle to the people. They didn't walk around it. They walked through it. Duffey also attempted to walk through it, but he stumbled into it violently, for it was solid and substantial to him. He tangled himself up, and he fell backwards with a resounding clatter. It was an obstacle to him, if not to others.

"What's with you, man?" a young fellow asked sharply. "You were walking along in the clear when all at once you

started to fall all over yourself. Then you stumbled backwards and fell flat.” The young fellow helped Duffey to his feet. “Are you all right?” he asked. “You are the clumsiest old bear I ever saw in my life.”

Yes, there are pitfalls and obstacles in the wilderness, and a man falls several times a day.

“I know it's rough a second or two beyond that sign, or a day or two beyond it,” Duffey said. “But maybe that is only the breakers breaking on the rocks. Will there not be clear water a little bit beyond them? How will it be a year beyond the barrier? I will see?”

“I and my giants will crash through! Power, power, lend me power! I have the modified lordship of time as a promise. I must make use of that now. I go through. Why is it so much harder than it used to be?”

Melchisedech went through the barrier and through the breakers that are just beyond it. And he found clear and nearly smooth water.

2

There should not be any awkward confrontations. Melchisedech had jumped one year into the future, but so had the world. To be sure that there would be no clashing of irreconcilables, Melchisedech walked to the Pelican Press which was the least awkward place that he knew. The memories of the jumped year should accrue to him now and supply him with all the background he needed. After all, this was himself, and these would be his memories. He was jumping that year completely, and he should have arrived with every impression of that year complete within him.

But they were a very clotted bunch of impressions, very many for some months, hardly any for others. They would

take some sorting out, and his own memories should be in him naturally.

He swung open the ornate door, bronzed by Finnegan, with the Holy Pelican so vivid on it, so alive that you wanted to throw it a fish. He entered, and he found Mary Virginia Schaeffer inside.

Few people have ever realized how complex a person was the open and intelligent and always kind Mary Virginia. And Duffey had not really realized it until he saw the look on her face now. Complex! Oh complex! She kept a gently burning look on him for a long time. She ran her hand over his face. "Ugh, my dear, ugh," she said. "That is my word on the subject. If I did not love you I could not stand you so at all. How have you come to this?"

That look of hers would have melted tin or brass. Well, Duffey was a tin horn sport loaded with brass, and it melted him completely.

"Oh Melchisedech, whatever will I do with you?" she said then. "You are the most exasperating person that I have ever known." But Duffey, for the life of him, couldn't think of anything exasperating he had done lately. His memories of the 'lately' were completely blank.

"What have I done wrong, Mary V.?" he asked. "You almost sound as if you weren't glad to see me this day. Fake it, sis, fake it. Pretend that you're glad to see me."

"I love you, Duff, but you shouldn't be here. Have any of the others seen you? They'll be frightened if they do see you."

"Why should anyone ever be frightened of me? Have I given you my review column for this week's *Bark* yet? Somehow I don't remember whether I have or not. If I haven't, I'll sit right down and do it now."

"Go ahead," Mary Virginia said. "No, you haven't done one for this week yet. Do it now if you wish, yes. It will certainly be a 'First'."

Duffey sat down at the little desk there and began to type quite rapidly. He wrote a very long and absolutely excellent review column, about three thousand words in a little more than an hour. His fingers and his mind had wings on them. It was an outstanding piece, loaded with insights and breakthrough stuff. Good! It was thumping good. Nobody around there, not even Stein, had ever marshaled such an array of crashing and illuminating ideas before.

Salvation Sally started into the room. She looked at Duffey rattling away at the typewriter. Then she gave an odd 'squawk' and bolted out of the room again. And Mary Virginia went out after her. Odd!

But it was not nearly so odd as the super-odd things that were flooding through Duffey and being transformed into thoughty words by his magic fingers. How they did rattle out of that machine! "It's as though I had acquired bi-mentality and bi-local vision," he told himself. "Never have I been able to see things from so many sides." Mary Virginia came back into the room after a while. She was smiling in seven-level arrangement and compression. And Duffey continued with his excellent piece.

Then the splendid and noetic Absalom Stein strode into the room. Yes, he was superb and splendid, and yes he knew it all. His daughter Becky was correct that he now suffered with overweening superbity. What, did he still have it? He had been suffering from it for more than a year then.

Stein looked at Melchisedech in an obscure way, not startled really, but not absolutely unstartled either. He shook his head that seemed to be even bigger than it used to be. He grinned a grin that was even wider than his previous record.

"I'll not believe it," he cried. "Whoop, I'll not believe it!" he howled. His rising howl broke into a roaring laugh, a grandfather guffaw, and he reeled out of the room overcome by something that went beyond merriment. And he could be heard with his echoing laughter filling all the streets outside.

"That man sure can laugh long," Melchisedech said. "I wonder why? What was so funny? They should barrel up laughter like that in casks and seal it. That was extraordinary."

And Duffey rattled along and finished his astonishing review article.

"Here it is, Mary Virginia," he said, "and it's good."

"I'm sure it is, I'm sure it is," she said. "We permit nothing that isn't good here. And now hadn't you better go?"

"What for? I like it here. It's my favorite place, after my own, of course. And besides, I am one-third owner of this place and its publications. Why are you angry with me? Or disappointed? Why are you whatever it is?"

"Have you done something bad, Melchisedech?" she asked. "Worse than usual, I mean."

"I don't think so. Not worse than usual, no."

"Then why are you wandering? Why haven't you found peace?"

"I'm not wandering, Mary Virginia. I'm not even in the mood to wander.

"And I am looking for peace, and for pattern and for purpose, and all such things. Why is there a misunderstanding between us today?"

"Well, why are you so ambiguous then?"

"Ambiguous? I? Never."

"Yes, ambiguous. Ghosts are always ambiguous. That's all that they are. They are the essence of ambiguity. What? Don't you really understand what it is, dear? You're dead all these months. You're a ghost. And properly disposed persons have no need to wander as ghosts. At least I don't believe that they do.

"Ah, you fade out! Good, good. Then you're not really wandering lost. Then I only saw you because I was tired, and your specter was part of my tiredness. But how did Salvation Sally and Absalom Stein see you then?

"Whatever it is, bless you, my friend."

Yes, Duffey faded out of there. But he didn't go away from there, only from them. So he would die within the year, the year less 'all these months'. Was that the death breathing its cold breath down his neck even now? But his death was already ordained in another place and time. Was there not a canonical impediment against dying twice?

Duffey withdrew from that crash year, and in doing so, he set it into the future once more. And then he was once again (it should be 'and then he was once before', but may grammar not perturb us) sitting in the all-things room at the Pelican press and trying to write a review column for the *Bark*.

"You've been fiddling away a lot of your time with that play that the Ursuline Academy girls are putting on," Mary Virginia was saying to him, "and then yesterday you were no good at all. It's as though you were in a daze all day long. Now you just finish that piece up! I need it this afternoon absolutely."

So Duffey worked away at the review column with sincere application. But it didn't come so easy, nor was it nearly so excellent, as the review that he had just done, a year ahead of now, as a ghost.

Absalom Stein came in with his excellent and splendid stride. Superbity, Superbity, thy name is Stein.

"What was so damned funny, Stein?" Duffey asked in a rasping voice. And Stein was a little taken aback.

Then Duffey howled. His rising howl broke into a roaring laugh, a primordial guffaw. This laughing filled the whole room. It was horse laugh, it was hoodoo hooting, it was gelasmus.

"Ah, the bubbly water people ought to bottle that stuff and sell it," Stein said. "It's good." Nobody could laugh so outlandishly as Duffey, unless it was Stein himself.

Duffey went out to the unsinkable boat-castle to have dinner

with Zabotski and Wife Waldo. They had been asking him for years, it seemed, and he had been promising to come for years. Duffey went out there in a taxi, but the taxi cab stopped three hundred yards from Zabotski Flats where the big castle-boat rode at kedge anchor. Zabotski Flats was about two hundred acres on Lake Borgne that Zabotski had bought. About two-thirds of it was sweet, and one-third of it salt meadows. All of it was incomparably lush, though the flats on each side of it were sparse of growth and worthless. So had Zabotski Flats been worthless when Zabotski had bought the spread at a low price. But then God and his sun had shined down on it, and God and his water had watered it and blessed it (such was Zabotski's explanation of the rich verdure of the place), all because Zabotski was a just man and selected for a special role.

You wouldn't believe the things that were grazing in the tall greenery of Zabotski Flats. You wouldn't believe that the lions and leopards had abjured flesh and were eating grass there, would you? Well, it wasn't grass they were eating, but it was vegetation. It was the *Nimrod Flesh Plant*, which is very rare in most parts of the earth but which was growing abundantly in the Flats.

Hippopotami and leviathan were grazing in the salt water meadows, belly-deep in the reed grass and the water, and happy with rumbling stomach song. Whales came up to the deeper part of the meadows and visited and joined their wisdom. Water buffaloes grazed in both the salt and the sweet portions. Zebras with all asses and cattle and sheep and goats, grazed in the sweet water parts of the fruits, with all rabbits and coneys and small game animals also.

There was a little skiff there on the mixed water and grass shore. Duffey stood in it and pushed his way out to the big contraption boat castle barge by using its single steering car. And there on the big floating craft it was all domestic festivity and family revel. Wife Waldo had a pot as big as

Duffey's own slumgullion pot (indeed the pots were twins) which she kept at an eternal simmer or low boil.

"You come without wife or without hopes of offspring, Melchisedech," Zabotski said. "What is there about you that is worth serving then? We take no sterile thing with us when we go on our grand float." Zabotski talked funny today.

"I come here to dinner by invitation," Duffey said. "I do not come here to be saved. Nevertheless, it is always a welcome side benefit when salvation falls to one. And you will not be going on your grand float today."

"Aye, today it will be," Zabotski swore in his sore-tongued voice.

"Every day, for nine years now, Zab has sworn 'Aye, today it will be,' " Wife Waldo put in her tupelo-wood car. "But we still drift here on the light anchor. Zab had his tongue butchered by the lynchers, and I tell that now he should talk a little bit less for a while and let me talk a little bit more. But there's no way that Zab could talk less."

They were seated at a very long table now, and several of the salt water oriented children were saying grace: "We thank thee for the hippopotamus steak and the rhinoceros steak and the behemoth steak and the leviathan steak and the alligator steak and the buffalo steak and the elephant steak and the green turtle steak. Amen."

"We eat a lot of steak here," Wife Waldo said. "We pan fry it in those deep pans over there." The deep pans were as big as airplane wheels.

"Aye, it was down by the Opera House last night that the low lynchers took me and tried to dishonor me and to kill me," Zabotski said. "Was that only last night? It seems longer. They put a halter over my head, a bit in my mouth, and a rope around my neck. They began to hang me. I roared for help, but the mouth bit had a tongue spike in it and I could not roar properly. Nevertheless, certain poor people of the neighborhood came to my aid, and I myself erupted like a volcano with horns and hoofs on it. The poor

people saved me, and I saved myself. We scattered those lynchings like chaff. But my tongue is mangled and so is my disposition. I tell you, Duffey, it isn't safe to be around that Opera House after dark."

There is nothing so homey as an ark. There was music and conversation, and all of it was homemade. There were flutes there (the first ones made by Zabotski, the others by the various children) for every child and ape and seal in the establishment, and there was no prohibition against playing at table. This made for a musical meal. All houseboats are homey, but none so homey as this ark. You do not get such numbers of animals on most houseboats, nor such numbers of children.

"There are fifty-two kids," Zabotski said, "all of them unrelated, and all of them of superior quality. This gives a strong genetic base. We will get our first crop from the kids this year. Wife Waldo says that we have been here for nine years (it doesn't seem like that long to me) so the oldest of the children will be fruiting this year.

"Melchisedech, these are smart kids. They know all the sciences and all the technologies. They even top me in a few fields. They are pious and imaginative and good-natured and loaded with understanding and scope. They take smart pills which they have invented themselves. They are splendid, but I told them this morning not to use the word 'splendid' any more. It's picked up distasteful connotations for me since last night. These kids do new things, with music (especially on the alligator skin drums). They do new things with mathematics. They do new things with metamorphics. They build the finest instruments in the world, and they build them for fun. They extract all one hundred and twenty elements out of the water of this open-mouthed salt lake, and then they change them from one to another. With such improvising kids, we need never run short of anything. They're the best kids that I ever saw."

There were many practical little tricks used there on the ark. Every person had a little hatchet with the other table implements beside his plate. Some of those rhinoceros and behemoth steaks are tough, but a good hacker can hack them into pieces, And the plates were of unbreakable Zabotski metal.

And each person had a small bow with arrows beside his place. This was to combine the sports of hunting and fishing with the sport of eating. Some of these those bowls of slumgullion were pretty lively, you see. A variety of small creatures had mutated there, under the guidance of some of the biologically minded kids, and now they were able to live and thrive in boiling water and boiling sludge. There were small, fierce, fanged sea creatures among them who disputed the contents of the bowls with the people. Oh, they struck like lightning when they struck, up out of the depths of the bowls of slum. But they could be shot with arrows just before they leapt.

"But it was loaded in our favor to begin with," one of the kids said. "It wasn't really fair. We could kill them with arrows. But all they could do to us was snap off a lip or a nose sometimes. So I have been redressing the balance."

"How have you been doing that?" Duffey asked warily. Zabotski was a joker, and even Wife Wildo was something of a joker. How would children raised by them not be jokers?

"I've taught two dozen of the midget octopuses to shoot little bows and arrows," the child said. (This was a female kid, and tricky.) "And I've made midget bows and arrows for them. I've also installed the shoot-to-kill instinct in them. The poison sepia concoctions for tipping the arrows was their own intention. A person shot by one of those poison tipped arrows will turn black and die within thirty seconds."

"Ah, and where are they now?" Duffey asked. "What did you do with the little blighters after you'd educated them and armed them?"

"I put them in the big pot," the child said. "And they had already settled on the go-for-the-open-spigot, go-for-the-bowls strategy'. I imagine that they are in the bowls now, the very bowls we are starting in on. I think it's better sport when things are more evenly matched, don't you? How are your own reactions, Mr. Duffey? Are your arrows handy enough for quick notching and your bow handy enough for quick drawing? Will you be able to spot an overt move in your slumgullion quickly enough? Remember, you have to shoot first, or you will die."

"I will shoot first," Duffey said.

"But if you should miss with your shot —"

"I won't miss," Duffey said.

That was one of the best and most homey and most wholesome dinners and visits that Duffey had ever experienced. If the world were destroyed and only this bright establishment saved, that would be better than if this bright establishment were destroyed and only the world saved. This group surviving would have to be entered on the gain side.

Duffey taught the children to make banjos that afternoon. They were good workers in all the materials, as their foster father was. And this would give a new note to the lively orchestration of the place. There would be some blessed plunking added to all the other blessings of the place.

If Duffey hadn't had an important appointment in town that evening, he might not have been able to tear himself away from the ark and its animals and people at all.

And the next evening, or maybe it was the evening after that, there was presented the play '*Seven Roads*' in the Ursuline Academy's auditorium. Melchisedech Duffey acted his own role excellently. And in the intermission he performed magic. Not magic acts, but real magic. And he also played on his banjo and on his recorder flute. The presentation was an overwhelming success.

In his finite wisdom, Melchisedech knew that whatever time he would take for visiting and private communications would be time he would have to steal. The night of the little play, and it was late that night after the play had been given, seemed to be the last normal night of his life. The recent, last time that this night had been lived through, it had been followed by a weird morning when the whole town was turned awry and a new people had come in and taken control. This same morning would hardly follow again, but there might be a morning equally spooky. In any case, Duffey might not have full freedom of action on the morrow.

And Duffey had decided on a series of visits that he wished to make. And as soon as he had decided on them, the fulfilling of them seemed imperative.

Duffey, retreating and retracing and using the same days and weeks and months several times over, made visits to most of his 'animations'. He feared this would be the last time he would ever see them in the normal flesh.

To a person who was not Duffey, it seemed as if there were lively doings in Duffey's diggings that night. Duffey went and returned close to a dozen times that night. He left in a hurry every time, and he returned in a hurry only minutes or hours later. And yet he might have spent a week or a month on several of his journeys of that night. He was playing fast and loose with time and space, before his powers in those directions should be taken away from him.

Duffey had decided to go to Havana Cuba on his first journey. Then he would go to the Marianao Coast a few miles from Havana to search for the place where Finnegan was said to have been killed. The death of Finnegan was supposed to have been many years before this. But Duffey

was not at all sure that Finnegan was dead. He intended to find out about it.

"I mean to talk to Finnegan," Duffey said. "Be he alive or be he dead, I intend to talk to him and to have answers to my questions. I don't believe that Finnegan ever meant to be mysterious or to leave a mystery behind him. It was quite by accident that it fell out so. His body was not found there. But no further traces of him were ever found either. He will be glad to see me. Dead or alive, he will always be glad to see me. We were close, though our actual time together did not number very many days. I have a great affection for him, and I have never gotten over the shock of his possible death. He was the most masterly of my 'Animations'."

Duffey had a few clues. He had one always startling clue, the picture of Finnegan's grave. And this most mysterious picture had most likely been painted by Finnegan himself.

That Painting hung in Duffey's *Walk-in Art Bijou* in New Orleans. It had been hanging there for more than thirty years. The name of it was '*The Resurrection of Count Finnegan*'.

"Of what was Count Finnegan a Count?" asked Carmelo Mendoza, the private detective who would accompany Duffey on the Cuban investigation.

"Possibly he was Count of nothing," Duffey said. "But he has titled this picture in his own hand, and he would not claim a title for himself that he didn't possess. One not-to-be-depended on source says that Finnegan was a Papal Count, that he was an *In Petto* Papal Count, so named by a Pope now dead."

"If he were named *In Petto*, In Secret, then we could hardly know about it," Carmelo said. "Who is this not-to-be-depended on source?"

"He calls himself Mr. X"

"Oh him. I know him. And are not some of your other clues from this Mr. X also?"

“They are, yes,” Duffey said. “Oh, X, be there something in your information this time!”

Duffey and the detective Carmelo Mendoza studied the picture again. Their luggage had already gone to the dock, and they would go there in a moment. And the detective had already taken photographs of the picture and extracted much information from it. But, ah, the picture itself!

“The painting was twelve feet by eight feet, and Count Finnegan... (was) shown as life-sized. The painting was really two paintings separated by a schizo-gash. In the larger portion, the burial crypt seemed to be an ocean cave under a rock shelf; but now there was a fissure in the rock roof of the cave, and air and sunshine were pouring in. The half-risen Count Finnegan was partly in the dark-green water and partly in the bright-green air. There was a stark and horrible risenness about him. There were places on him where the flesh had fallen away from his bones as will sometimes happen when a person in either death or time-stasis is subject to an abrasion; and the under-the-rock-shelf water had apparently been abrasive. Count Finnegan was setting back in its place one long strip of flesh that had fallen away from its bone, and he showed sure intent of repairing other flesh damage and decay. He was identified by a Latin scroll there, as the Papal Count Finnegan. Finnegan Solli had always been good at reproducing Latin scrolls.

“The Count Finnegan in the picture seemed about thirty years older than the John Solli Finnegan would have been at the time of his reported death, which had been between two and three years before the time of the arrival of the painting at Melchisedech Duffey's New Orleans place. So it was a self-painting of Finnegan as it would appear twenty-five to thirty-five years in the future...

“Solli-Finnegan's big banana nose had acquired nobility and distinction on the Count in the picture. The flesh-mending hands of the pictured Count were even more intricate and talented than Finnegan's recent artist's hands which would be remembered by all who had ever known him. There was still the outrageous humor mixed with the warping pain and torture in the eyes. There was still the loose strength and speed of a yearling bullock... on the Count in the picture. There was still the mouth in motion, and one had the feeling of soon being able to hear the multi-dialected words and spating phrases from the painted Count. But there was an added texturing of the whole person that appears mostly in those who have risen from the dead. The flesh had suffered simultaneous transfiguration and corruption and was now in a state of violent incompleteness. There was a locality about the flesh change; partly it was the sea change of un-coffined dead... Count Finnegan was in the rags and

tatters of what may have been a winding sheet. But beside him , there were solid but old clothes for him to put on, traveler's clothes."

How Many Miles To Babylon.

'*How Many Miles To Babylon*' was a fictional piece written by a member of the old Finnegan outer circle. But it described the painting well, and so it is given here. It is one of the clues that Duffey turned over to the detective Carmelo Mendoza. But Mendoza had now absorbed the painting itself, and he would never forget it.

Mendoza stowed the other clues, in his mind or in his cases and folders, and they went down to the docks to take the Cuban boat.

This man Carmelo Mendoza, he was a happy-looking and wistful-looking clown. He was a small and lively man, but he seemed about as old as Duffey. He rolled his r's in the Austrian manner, and he had the palest eyes and hair that anyone ever saw. He seemed to know everything instantly, and he came well recommended by many people.

By whom? By what people? Well, by Teresa Showboat Piccone Stranahan of St. Louis. And by anyone else? Oh, by no one else. No one else was needed. Teresa herself was many people, and her recommendations were tops.

"Duff, this Carmelo is right all the way," Teresa wrote. "Since you are now starting out on a series of very tricky trips that will scrape both sides of the tunnel, I believe you should have Carmelo with you. He understands high trickery. He is only a so-so private detective, but he is a superb companion and friend.

"My love to the diminishing 'All of You'."

Oh, Teresa was all-understanding, that's why she knew that Melchisedech was starting out on a series of trips that would scrape both sides of the tunnel. One side of the tunnel was 'world' and the other side of it was 'time'. She

knew that Melchisedech would have to leave and return to both of these on his journeys and do it again and again.

It would have been quicker to fly to Cuba, but perhaps they wouldn't have been allowed to disembark there. There was still a prevailing fussiness against Americans there.

Carmelo had provided seaman's pipers for both himself and Duffey, and they traveled is working seamen. Duffey's name was 'Mike Duffey' on the papers, and he was given as a citizen of the Irish Free State. ("You should able to remember 'Mike'," Carmelo said, 'and you sure should be able to remember 'Duffey'.) And Carmelo Mendoza himself was Karl Metz, and he was given as a West German. But who was he really? Duffey quickly understood that Carmelo was in love with disguises and with plots.

So they sailed for six sunny days and starry nights. Both of them were competent seamen and had clearly sailed as seamen many times before. Well then, they were nearly sure to meet someone that they had sailed with before.

"What is your real life history behind your surface life history?" Carmelo asked him one day. "If I am to serve and lead you through your puzzles, I think I should know this. It is clear that this lifetime is only an episode in your existence, but how did you come into it? How did your present phase of existence come to be?"

"Ah yes, I had been on the Holy Ship," Melchisedech said in a dreamy voice. "I had been doing high gestes that I am not allowed to remember in normal circumstance. Then I left the ship and came ashore. Well, I was given a short shore leave on the shore of my choice. That is what my present lifetime is. I came ashore swimming and then wading through turbulent water. It was early morning. The shore was muddy, with engendering mud, and full of promise. It was the year 1923, and I was a young man of no more than a quarter of a century of physical years. I went up that muddy

shore and entered into the green and burgeoning years of a life.

"I tell you, there is no pleasure like starting a new life at age of less than twenty-five years. And I seem to remember that I had a choice of shores, and of green and burgeoning years. And I remember that I will always have that choice, again and again and again. I will have it if I only remember that I have it. That's the trick to it, if I only remember that I have it."

"Oh, I'll remind you," Carmelo said. "I'll make it a point of being there in your extremity, and reminding you that you have choices left."

But how odd it was that Duffey should tell such things to a comparative stranger like Carmelo.

As it happened, Duffey did meet a seaman he knew. This was about mid morning of their first day at sea. It was a gnarled and cheerful oldster named Horace Pie, a Scotchman. He had sailed with Duffey once in years gone by, on quite a long voyage, and he had met Duffey on several shores since then. And he had known Finnegan.

"You are going to find what you can of his death and entombment, Duffey? I will be ashore in Havana for three days. I'll go with you. I'm curious about the thing myself. I've heard stories about him. He's one of the legends now. I don't know where he's entombed, but there are people who do know. I say entombed, not buried. There's a difference. And entombment isn't such a tight fit.

"They call Finnegan '*The Sleeping Man*'. Did you know that? So there are others who don't believe that he's dead for sure. You're traveling with Eggs, heh?"

"With eggs, Horace?"

"Ya, Mr. Eggs. And now he calls himself Metz. He is all right. Harmless. And he does tell some tall ones."

"Oh," said Duffey. "Oh, and again Oh. How unperceptive of me! But he always did love disguises. Yes, I've known him before also, so it's odd that I didn't know him this time."

"Can you still rub your hands and make gold coins, Duffey?" Horace Pie asked him.

"Yes, yes, I suppose that I can still do it."

"That talent will come in handy when you try to get information about Finnegan in Cuba. In Cuba, they don't say 'What's that?' when they see a bit of gold. They circulate a lot of it and it will buy a lot there."

"Then I will circulate a lot of it, if it will buy information about Finnegan."

"Did you know, Duffey," Pie said, "that several men once plotted to chop off your hands. They believed that the coining power was in your hands and not in yourself. They believed that they could keep your severed hands and rub them together whenever they wanted, and set up a rain of gold coins. But you were too canny for us. We never had the chance to lop your hands. I was one of the men who plotted against your hands. I was younger then. They grew us pretty green in the green hills of Scotland."

"I have information already," X said to Duffey on the second day. "There are about a hundred of those tide-water caves that are two-thirds underwater and have their entrances underwater; these are in about a seven mile stretch along the Marianao Coast. All we have to do is find the right one. How are you at underwater swimming?"

"Good enough, Mr. Eggs," Duffey said. "But it will be very choppy water along a shelf like that. Nobody will be very good at it. I could go down. I could enter half a dozen of the caves. But I could never enter a hundred."

"When did you tumble that I was Mr. X, Mr. Duffey," X asked, for he was Carmelo Mendoza and he was also Karl Metz. X, the old friend and dealer of doubtful information.

"You think I would not always know my own handiwork, X? I made you, or at least I evoked your clay."

"Then Signora Stranahan in St. Louis won her bet," X said. "She bet that you would know me in whatever disguise

I used. But I bet not one person in a million would have known me. Have you still your facility for coining gold, Mr. Duffey?"

"I hope that I have it yet."

"It will go well in Cuba. Golden tips get information."

There was still the testiness about Americans in Cuba, but Duffey and X got in all right. An Irishman like Duffey can always pass for all Irishmen. And X was one quarter German and had but to speak in the way that his maternal grandfather had spoken.

Then Duffey and X and Horace Pie were down along the coast, telling people that they were looking for the sea level tomb of the 'Sleeping Man' and that they would give one gold coin or even two for real information.

"He is not here," said a man full of ancient integrity. "He was there for thirty years, and no one came to see what his problem was. And just yesterday he went away. And today you come. Bad luck that."

"How did he go away?" Duffey asked.

"I don't know how," the man said, "but I'm sure that he went away. More than thirty years ago, the woman said that he was sleeping and not dead. She had him put in a tomb cave with a sea door to it. "Let him not be disturbed," she said. "Let him be forgot. In his own time he will wake up." And so it was. The woman, *La Dorotea*, she was here for about three weeks after that. Then she died. She had been wounded by gunshot and her strength never came back to her. She is buried in the San Francisco cemetery on the other side of the city. She is buried there because she had a medallion showing that she belonged to the Third Order of St. Francis. But the sleeping man has waked and gone yesterday."

"No, he is not gone. He is still there," several young boys said. "Give us gold coins, and then give us half an hour, and

we will take you to the 'Sleeping Man' in his hole under the sea shelf."

"Are you sure that he is the same 'Sleeping Man'?" Horace Pie asked suspiciously.

"Oh sure. There is only one of them," the ringleader of the boys slid. "We call him the Long-Sleep Man and we even make a song about him." The boy sang a little snatch of song that had words such as 'hombre' and 'durmiendo' in it. "Hell, it even has an English chorus to it," he said then.

Long-Sleep *MAN*, in sweet repose.

Long-Sleep *MANNNN*, with baNAAna nose!"

"Yes, that's Finnegan," Duffey said. He rubbed his hands together and brought forth three gold pieces and gave one to each boy.

"We need two more of them," the ringleader boy said. "He won't do it for less than two gold pieces. I don't think he will."

"Who won't do what?" Duffey asked.

"Ah, a confederate of ours. He can find the cave better than we can. But he has to have two gold pieces."

Duffey rubbed his hands together and produced two more gold pieces. The ringleader boy took them and ran off, apparently to find the confederate.

Duffey struck another gold piece and gave it to the man full of ancient integrity who still insisted that the Sleeping Man had left the burial cave the day before. And Duffey had a suspicion that he was right.

Then the three men, Duffey and X and Horace Pie, went with the two remaining boys and entered three of the caves with underwater entrances. None of them was the right one, and the underwater swims were rather strenuous.

After that, the ringleader boy returned. He led them into another cave by another submarine 'set door'. They came up into a space that was slightly above the water and that had sunlight seeping down through the cracks in its rocky beech roof.

And there was a sleeping man there. He was a portly Cuban man, lying nude on a rock shelf. And his workman's clothes were piled beside him. But he wasn't Finnegan and he hadn't been there for thirty years, nor even for thirty minutes. The sleeping opened one eye and looked at them.

"O...?" he asked.

"O.K. I suppose," Duffey said, "but you're not the man we're looking for."

"The other, original 'Sleeping Man' really did go away yesterday," the ringleader boy said. "But we will not give you back your gold. We've hidden it."

"All right," Duffey said, "But take us to the cave of the real 'Sleeping Man'."

"We take you there, but he himself is gone," the ringleader boy said.

They came to it, out of the dripping sea and into its half darkness touched with sunlight. Yes, it was Finnegan's tomb. He was not there, but things that had touched him were still there. Fragments of his aura still hung there, discernible. And there were a few carvings in low round on the walls that had unmistakably been done by Finnegan. Like a hibernating bear, he had brief moments of wakefulness during his long sleep.

And this was clearly the cave that had been shown in that painting '*The Resurrection of Count Finnegan*'. But Finnegan was not there.

"The old man spoke true," Horace Pie commented. "Finnegan was here yesterday and he has left."

"If he was here yesterday, then I will go to yesterday and see him before he leaves," Melchisedech said. Pie and X laughed, but Duffey cast a deep sleep on them, cutting across their laughter.

It was yesterday in the burial cave then. Pie and X were not there, but Finnegan and Melchisedech were there. And a murderous white shark was there also, full in the sea door or

underwater entrance to the cave, avid to prevent anyone leaving alive. The white shark intended to kill the awakened Count Finnegan should he attempt to leave by sea.

And there was an unfriendly man standing on the flat shore over their heads, intending to kill Count Finnegan if he should find a way up through the fissured roof of the cave to come out to full day. The word of the Resurrection had reached the Enemies, and they would prevent it by every way possible. Count Finnegan knew that the man was there, and Melchisedech knew that he was.

Count Finnegan seemed to have passed through extreme agony only the moment before, but now he was alive and awake and intense. He had been speaking when Duffey broke into his yesterday, and he continued to speak, or to pray.

"My rock, be not deaf to me," Finnegan said, but not exactly to Melchisedech, though he saw him.

"Lest if thou hear me not, I become like unto them who go down unto the pit," Melchisedech spoke in the same psalm prayer.

Finnegan: "Though war should rise against me, even then will I trust."

Melchisedech: "One thing I ask. This do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life."

Finnegan: "He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, and Sharion like a young buffalo."

Melchisedech: "The Lord shakes the desert of Cades."

Finnegan: "He rises in the darkness, as a light to the upright."

Melchisedech: "He shall not fear bad news."

Finnegan: "I am shut in and cannot go out."

Melchisedech: "They surround me like water all day long."

Finnegan: "I lie down among the dead, like the slain who lie in the grave."

Melchisedech: "Your youth is renewed like the eagle's."

Finnegan: "He has shaken the earth, he has torn it apart."

Melchisedech: "Heal its branches, for it quakes."

Finnegan: "They howl like dogs and prowl about the city."

Melchisedech: "Rise up."

Finnegan: "My tears were kept in thy water skin."

Melchisedech: "Are they not recorded in thy book?"

Finnegan: "Therefore we do not fear, though the earth be overthrown."

Melchisedech: "And the mountains crash into the midst of the sea."

Finnegan: "I lay down and slept."

Melchisedech: "You arose."

Finnegan: "He waits in ambush near the villages. He lurks in secret places like a lion in his lair. There are traps for my feet. I must find my way among them."

Melchisedech: "There will be light for your feet. He has called you to rise from the sea."

Finnegan: "Have I found out the secret of the darkness? Have I found the kindling of the light?"

Melchisedech: "He has saved you for this latter time."

Finnegan: "Here are my hands, if it should pass into them. What if I should hold the crown and raise it above the teeth of the dogs?"

Melchisedech: "Ascend into the city. There are doings that only you can do."

Finnegan: "The lines have failed for me in pleasant places. I am greatly pleased with my inheritance."

Melchisedech: "Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost. And now that we have prayed together, Finn of my heart, tell me what mission you go on. It's a violent one, I know, to call you out of death sleep for it."

Finnegan: "It's a violent one, yes. It will be a sort of spy thriller, Duffey, if you must know the category of it. And, like all good spy thrillers, the fate of the world will depend on its resolution. You cast two friends of mine into a deep sleep about this time tomorrow, did you not?"

Melchisedech: "Yes, Finnegan, I did. And now if you will let me... or tell me what your great mission is... or at least let me see whether you escape the man and the shark. Let me see how you do it, or if you do."

Finnegan: "It sure will be tricky, Duffey. But I haven't been in abeyance for thirty years to blink out now. You put my friends to sleep tomorrow. I put you to sleep now."

Melchisedech: "Wait, Finnegan, wait—"

But Duffey was into deep sleep. And woke up when X and Pie woke up. It was the day that it should have been. And Finnegan had risen the day before and gone on his journey.

"That white shark, thirty yards off the breakers there," Duffey said after they had surfaced outside of the cave, and then they were getting onto the high shore fast. "That white shark, does he look fed?"

"He does not," Horace Pie said. "He is hungry. And he is frustrated and furious. I do not want any congress with that embittered shark."

4

Duffey and X went to Chicago. X was complaining of time lag which is of much more effect than jet lag caused by having one's time of day disrupted by fast travel. Duffey had gone several weeks into the past, and he had taken X with him. X did not look well, but he looked more himself. He had not yet lightened his hair nor (by special process known only to himself) lightened his eyes to give himself a disguise.

"This is awkward. It is even outrageous," X fumed. "Why is it necessary that we traverse time contrary-wise?"

"To avoid my own death," Duffey said. "My death would impose a special set of conditions on my travel. I have it pretty well narrowed down when I will die, on a certain night

or on the night after that, and we were coming too close to them. I like a very short leeway. I believe that it deepens my piety to know that I am always within two weeks of my death."

"Your set is already ordained, man," X said. "You know in what future it will be. I brought your ashes back from that time. You will not die within two weeks."

"There are paradoxes about me that you know not of," Duffey said. "I will go when I will go, but first I want to see all of my nation once more in the normal flesh."

"But is Casey in the normal flesh now?" X asked. "There is some doubt about that, Casey has become — ah —"

"Casey has become a cult figure," Mary Catherine Carruthers told them fifteen minutes later when they had gone to see her. "And as such he makes more than thirty thousand dollars a week. There is big money in being a cult figure. I don't know whether you'll be able to see him or not. Hardly anybody gets to see him now. And when you do see him, you haven't seen much. He's clear off the world, in another world of his own. There is even good physical evidence that he is clear off the world when he is in one of his raptures."

" 'That fish, Prince Casimir!' is what Bascom Bagby always called him. Well, but Casey says that he is one of the two Zodiacal Fish. Christ is the other one. Cult leaders aren't known for their modesty. I have always wondered how Casey hooked people, but he has always had me hooked worse than any of them. Take me out on the town tonight, fellows! I don't go out nearly enough. The Casey sickness is pretty awkward, and I can't shake it. He really is a total phoney, granted. Well then, that means that one of the two Zodiacal Fish is a total phoney, for Casey is indeed in the Zodiac. He has painted a remarkable painting of the curile chair on which he sits in the Zodiac. It's loaded with living and crawling symbolism. Casey is nearly, for very short spurts, as good a painter as Finnegan was, is. Sometimes Casey says

that he's the Antichrist. I don't know whether he believes it or not, but countless of his followers say it and believe it. 'It is the highest status ever attained by any human,' they say. 'It should be a matter of pride to every human that one of us has risen to give the highest challenge.' His followers, ugh! But I am generally accounted as one of his leading followers, and those who so account me are the ones who say 'That Carruthers woman, ugh!' No. I'm sure he won't see you. But Hilary Hilton has just come in and he will be overjoyed to see you."

Mary Catherine Carruthers worked for Hilary Hilton, that dynamically lazy young tycoon who liked to gather in money and power.

"The enormously spoiled brat, Rolo Danovitz, the Antichrist of a current cycle of quasi-fiction, is Casey exactly," Hilary Hilton was saying two minutes later. Hilary was nephew to Duffey's dead best friend Sebastian Hilton, and Hilton and Duffey had become very good friends in the middle and later years. "Casey is the spoiled brat who squawled for the stars so loudly and stridently that they had to be given to him. The dark stars, that is: ah, the dark stars belong to Casey now, and they're at least half the stars. Does Casey really believe that he's Antichrist? That's a question that's often asked. Why shouldn't he believe it? That's who he is, Certainly I mean it. I spent several million dollars establishing his identity, and it has been established. Not one of the top five minds in the world doubts the identity now. But I've known who it is since we were both small boys.

"Casey makes much ado about his sacrificing himself for humanity, and for the 'larger humanity', and especially for those most unfortunate and most abused creatures in all creation, the demons. But Casey misleads here. He never sacrificed in his life. He's incapable of sacrifice. But he demands sacrifice to himself by all. He gets it most of the time too. He's insatiable in his demands.

"No, Duffey, I don't believe he's into the cultishness for the money. He's low, but he isn't that low. And I don't believe that being even a top cult figure pays all that well. Oh, maybe he clears forty or fifty thousand dollars a week. I make more money than that myself, and Casey's at least as smart as I am. He could be making more than that in some honest line of business. He would have done better to marry Mary Catherine here and prosper legitimately. So would I have done better to marry Mary Catherine here. But my wife Mary Jean preempted both Casey and myself. No, I don't think that Casey will see you. He believes that he can out-measure you, Duffey, but not without a bruising psychic battle, and he wants to avoid that. The only two persons he does not believe that he can out-measure are Finnegan and Bishop Salvatore. He's afraid to go to the test with either of them. Casey has always insisted that Finnegan is still alive. And now my own very high priced investigators have told me that Finnegan is indeed alive, that he is waking from his deathlike sleep right now, and that he will leave his tomb within the next ten or twelve days. He is destined for some tricky doings. Finnegan has come to look exactly like Josef Cardinal Hedayat of Antioch. Cardinal Joseph is the other person, separated off by the schizo gash from Count Finnegan, in that remarkable painting '*The Resurrection of Count Finnegan*' which painting belongs to me and is kept by you in your Walk-In Art Bijou in New Orleans. You must know that Cardinal Josef is the best bet to be next Pope. But some of those who see into the future, imperfectly and in rough hunks though they see, say that by a contrived mix-up Count Finnegan will be the one who actually assumes the Crown, though he will be known as Josef Cardinal Hedayat until he is known as Peter the Second."

"That is a large order, Hilary," Duffey said.

"True, but I have the most penetrating investigators in the world, and many of them move easily beyond the world

to gather their data. One of the (not the best of them) most outré of them is X here."

"You blow my cover!" X said with open exasperation.

"Duffey, I know that Casey will refuse to see you," Hilary said. "But he can be manipulated. We will make him want to come to you. How about my getting a hundred or so of your best remaining friends together for a little intimate party tonight? I will bet you that Casey crashes it. He hates to be left out. 'Highest status ever attained by a human or not', Casey doesn't like to be passed over. He will come, if he knows that I am throwing the party, and that I refused to invite him."

"All right," Duffey said.

"This Casey has never impressed me a lot," said that mendacious midget Charlotte Garfield. "Yes, I know who he is. He really is the Antichrist. But that's only a high-sounding title. It carries very little prestige with the real inner circle people.

"As a confidence man, he breaks the basic code. He *does* prey on widows and orphans, on the helpless, and on the inept. His whole fellowship is among such. He seldom pitches to persons of intelligence and canniness, unless they have an extreme tilt that makes them vulnerable. He is not an honest hunter. He has no conception of conmanship as high hunting of tough and resourceful game.

"Oh, he has learned a big hatful of tricks, patiently and thoroughly. But he uses them mostly on gravid females and on children of all ages. Yes, he does have a foot in each world, or in each of several worlds. So have I, so have you Duffey, so have you X; that isn't a great thing. He is a cheap shotter to his heart.

"As to the eschatological aspects of his activities, those are the last things I want to think about."

"Hilary Hilton is giving a small and intimate party for myself and a hundred or so of my old friends tonight,

Charlotte," Duffey said.

"Yes, he's called me. I'll be there," the damnable midget agreed.

But in the early evening, an hour or so before the small gathering of the hundred or so ultimate friends, Duffey called Casey. He did not call on phone or on Intimo. He knew that he wouldn't get through to him if Casey was on the high hobby. But he called him in a direct and undeviced way.

And Casey talked to Duffey in saying that he would not talk to him. This was one of the direct conversations that did not come over any of the approved channels.

"I will not see you," Casey said, "and I will not permit you to see me. On no account will we meet again. Be gone, clown."

"You *will* see me, if I have to have your head brought here and set before me, with your eyes sewn open, you will see me," Duffey swore. "And you will see me in the seeing of many millions of people. On early prime time television we will have you, Casey."

"I know power, Duffey, and I know that you have not the power to compel me to any such silliness," Casey said. "Oh, I swore that I would not talk to you, and I will not. Nor see you. Nor hear you."

Casey scrambled the very air and æther, and Duffey could not reach to him again. But Duffey believed that he could project him.

This trick of projecting persons and situations and pitches on television was one of Casey's own strong tricks, though he always denied any complicity or intent in it. But Casey had projected his idealized face and his eerie-toned voice in superposition on hundreds of programs. That is really how he became so well known as the Anti-Christus. This projection is not too difficult for one who is a genius at electronics and a giant in psyche.

The intimate party was at Randal's. Duffey told them there that an interesting over-picture would appear that evening on the channels, one worth minute study. So a three-meter set was brought into the Cenacle or supper room.

And the over-picture came while that suppertime family comedy, Goldfarb's Alley, was on the tube.

Violence was only used for clownish effect on Goldfarb's Alley; so when the horrible screaming began, many of the watchers thought that it was supposed to be funny. Others knew at once that something was very very wrong, that the screaming didn't belong there at all. Some thousands recognized that beloved voice, and knew that the person was in agony. They begin to pour out into the streets within seconds. They would kill for their cult hero. They would tear the town apart to extricate him from danger. All they needed was direction.

For others, the surface fun was quickly milked out of the comedy, and the sound became grizzly. And yet there might be a deeper and darker fun in it. The over-picture appeared to reinforce the sound. There were four black giants of demiurgic appearance. They were carrying a livid object by its hair.

The horrifying object was the head only of Kasimir Szymansky, Casey of the Zodiac, the fantastic cult figure. It was not shown as severed. It was shown as a head-only person, grimacing horribly, and cursing. It would shiver anybody just to watch it.

"Not bad, Duffey," Hilary Hilton said. "How do you do it?"

"I take it from a picture that Adam Scanlon once painted of Casey, unbeknownst to Casey himself. Scanlon had no use at all for Casey, though Scanlon was a close friend of Finnegan and Finnegan was of the inner world with Casey. The animation and presentation of it? Oh, that's a little harder. It's taking a lot out of me," Melchisedech Duffey said.

"These things don't come as easy for me as they used to. The power is just not what it once was."

"I want the original of that Scanlon painting," Hilary said. "I lust for it."

"I'll send it to you," Duffey said.

"I will not see! I will not see!" the lolling mouth of the atrocious head was rattling out in jerky anger. "I will not see you at all, mangy magus."

But the eyes of the head were sewn open and there was no way that the livid head could close them. The head groaned and sweat profusely.

All of the people on the Goldfarb's Alley Comedy Show had abandoned the screen to the grotesque head and the black giants that still held it. The alley people had fled away in terror. But they were just pictures, and were not present on the individual screens in person. Maybe not, but still they fled away in terror. They did not want any part of that livid head. The apparition was building up to a point of vivid horror.

But then a tensely cool voice broke over the screen, broke over millions of screens on all channels, attempting to override the visibility and the strident sound.

"This presentation is a fraud!" the cool but tense voice announced. "It is projected *by* a fraud. I am Casey of the Zodiac, the Anti-Christus, and I say that this livid head is not mine. It is only a sick dream. I am not captured. I am not compelled to look at trash. I beg you, people who believe in me, do not riot in the streets. I am not captured. I am not harmed. I am not threatened. This picture is sheer fraud."

But the mouth and the voice of the living head cried out, "This is no fraud."

The head rolled its eyes inward till only the bloodshot whites of them could be seen, and they could not be compelled to see anything except the head's own interior darkness. "I will not meet this magus, I will not look upon him," the head said.

But one of the black giants made cuts at the corners of the head's eyes with a surgical instrument. Then he went deeper with another instrument, and snipped. He did this to the region behind each eye. He cut the optic nerves and muscles so that the eyes came to the front again and could not be rolled back into the head.

"I will not see this monster!" the head roared. And yet its eyes were sewn open and it had to see him. The eyes did see Melchisedech. In malevolence they saw him.

"There is rioting in the streets," an official of Randal's said as he came to them in the Cenacle Room. "It's broken out everywhere just in seconds. This Zodiac person has millions of intense followers and defenders."

"Street riots in Chicago have always had an amateurish quality," Duffey said. "They don't do much real damage."

"These are doing real damage," the official said. "I believe the picture that has set them off is originating right here. I ask you to terminate it."

"Wait a minute," Duffey said. "He's caving in. I can feel him cave."

And Casey, watching the bloated caricature of his own head, hearing the croaking burlesque of his own voice in its agony-humor, did cave in. Casey was a bit fastidious. Stark things offended him.

"You win, Melchisedech," the Casey voice came, cool and with a touch of venom, both on the big TV set and independent of it. "Turn it off. I'll be down to the party immediately. Such things as these pass for humor with the Duffeyites."

Casey arrived there in about seven minutes. He had climbed down from his Curile Chair in the Zodiac, and he showed quite a bit of the old Casey in him, only about half covered up by the cult figure. The old Casey had always been a fair sort of party man, sometimes setting aside his pride for hours on end for enjoyment in the company of old

acquaintances. For everyone here was an acquaintance of Casey as well as of Melchisedech Duffey.

It was a good party. It was five hours of the most urbane festivities ever. There have not been so many bright people in one room, actually four rooms of the suite that they overflowed, since Olympus was torn down to build a 'Look-Out Lodge and Leisure Hostel' up there.

Hilary Hilton and Mary Jean (she was the only one in the world who had ever really set Casey's heart to howling and baying), Demetrio Glauch, Clarence Schrade, Silas and Maude Whiterice, the Countess Margaret Hochfelsen (only next week you will be a Royal Pop Person, Countess, and much younger than you are now: do you know that?), Lily Koch (Oh Lily, Lily, Lily!), Mary Frances Rattigan (Gompers), Mary Catherine Carruthers, Ethyl Ellenberger and her husband John Ryan, Nathan and Shirley Stone (Duffey was pretty sure that Nathan was a brother, and less abrasive person, than Absalom Stein), Elena O'Higgins, d'Alesandro, Charlotte Garfield and her son Michael, Enos Dorn, Angelo Cato, Ira and Rebecca Spain, Homer and Evangeline Durbin, Mike and Peggy Conner, Isaac and Mary Lightfoot, Judley and Pauline Peacock, Mary Carmel Hooligan, Mother Mary Aurora, Enniscorthy and Mary Margaret Sweeny, Tony and Evelyn Apostolo, Cletus Kenealy, Cassius and Mary Greatheart, Leo Ring, Martin and Katherine Redwine, Nemo Cobb, Fred and Helen Batavia, X, Melchisedech Duffey, many, many others were there. So many of the old friends were still there, and so many others were sleeping in the Lord. And Casey of the Zodiac, what could you make of him?

On this night, Melchisedech saw these good friends of his for the last time in the normal flesh. He reveled in the company of almost all of them, and in particular in that of one of his Splendid Animations, Mary Catherine Carruthers.

But he did not solve the riddle of the other one of his Splendid Animations here: Kasimir Szymansky, Casey of the Zodiac, the self-proclaimed Anti-Christus. Casey was

wrapped in several thicknesses of riddles, and he would not be penetrated in a day or a week now. But it was a good party, and one that would be remembered in this world and in the next.

5

'It's NOLA for all Quirks and Quips,
Havana for rum graves and rum,
Chicago for Companionships,
St. Louis for Symposium.

[Count Finnegan, *Road Songs*]

Duffey and X went to St. Louis. There was a concentration of his Animated Marvels there, Hans Schultz and wife Marie Monahan, Vincent Stranahan and his wife Teresa Piccone. Four of them was almost critical mass. And a fifth one was there that Duffey didn't know was there. This was critical mass, considering that X was also an Animated Marvel.

The one of them that Duffey did not expect to find in St. Louis was Henri Cardinal Salvatore of New Orleans.

"Whatever are you doing here in St. Louis, friend and elevated person," Duffey asked. "I was saving you for the last. I intended to see you in New Orleans before my skein quite runs out."

"I came to St. Louis to see *you*," Cardinal Salvatore said. "You will not return to New Orleans. Your skein runs out here."

"You are sure of that, your tallness?"

"Was I ever sure of anything? I was just talking to Dame Bagby about the situation. She believes that you should be buried here. There is a lot for you in their plot. You can be beside your quasi-brother Bagby, and perhaps you will be

with him in person also. He's presently residing on the north slope of Purgatory, if you need guidance to find him. And after a bit the Dame will join you there."

The Cardinal was referring to Duffey's sister as Dame Bagby, and indeed she had become something of a dame, weighty and ponderous, but merry yet.

"You have it all figured out," Duffey said. "Could you tell me what day my obsequies would be?"

"No point in telling you," the Cardinal said. "Figure you have it almost through this weekend. Then we can bury you Monday or Tuesday. Yes, neat, Melchisedech. The world will be a bit lonesome without you."

They were in the old Stranahan residence, the Cat Castle. Patrick Stranahan was dead. Charley Murray was dead. Papa Piccone was dead. Father McGuigan was dead. "I should have come two years ago," Melchisedech said, "and seen them a last time in their worn-out mortal coils. Marry me, Monica. You should have come into a good inheritance."

"Oh, you would only give it away," Monica said. Duffey had given away his half-ownership in the *Rounders' Club* just that day. Well, Charley Murray, in his will, had left his half interest in the club to his nephew Vincent Stranahan. So Duffey now deeded his half interest to Teresa Showboat Piccone Stranahan. Now those two were running it. It would continue to be a fine club in the old tradition.

"You haven't delayed your own death one moment by your scurrying around through time," the Cardinal Salvatore said. "This is the day it is supposed to be. You will die when you are supposed to die. And another good man will be gone to the greater thing."

"Yes, the calendar did jump ten days when I wasn't paying attention," Duffey said. "But I can always make it jump back again."

"No, you cannot," the Cardinal said. "Never again. The gears and the activating rods of that device have rusted fast

now, and they'll never work for you again. It was only boyishness, and it's taken away from you now."

"There is always the *Argo*," X said.

"What is the *Argo*?" Melchisedech Duffey asked him. Probably they were talking in the *Bread and Wine Room* at *Rounders' Club* now, or at Cabramatta Castle which was the home of Hans and Marie, or in the Burlesque Buffet Room in the house of Vincent and Teresa, or at Dame Bagby's Place. Probably those present were Dame Bagby, Hans and Marie and Cecilia Schultz (Cecilia was one of the daughters-in-law), Vincent and Teresa and their three younger children Chiara and Rafaello and Theresa Anna who were born so many years after their older children, Monica Murray Stranahan, Philip Stranahan the oldest brother of Vincent, Duffey, X, Henri Cardinal Salvatore. It was a pleasant continuing conversation or symposium that went on for several days, the last several days of Duffey's normal life.

"Do you not remember the *Argo*, Melchisedech?" Teresa asked. "We are not supposed to remember that grand ship when we are not actually sailing on her. There is an amnestic mechanism that insures that we do not remember, but I myself cheat a little bit on it, and I believe that you others do also."

"The only *Argo* I have heard of is in Bulfinch's *Mythology*. What is this grand ship and what flag does she sail under?"

"That of the Kingdom of Colchis," Henri Cardinal Salvatore said. "No, we do not ordinarily remember the *Argo* except when we are sailing on her. And if, during our land tenure, we do remember a little bit about it, we feel that it is more symbolic than real. And yet it's a grand thing to ship as an Angel before the Mast, as an Ancient Salt-Water Shepherd who smells strongly of sheep, as a person who may sail over the edge of the world again and again and again. I believe that I myself have been sailing on her quite recently. I feel the sustaining salt-wind of an *Argo* voyage sustaining me in all that I do. But the days and years spent

on the *Argo* are not deducted from the days and years of life. They are outside of that. And of the mariners on the *Argo*, some are in the flesh and some are out of it, and some are of a fishy flesh. But one cannot play tricks with the *Argo*."

"I can," X said. "I do it constantly."

"Should Duffey, in the last minute of his life, decide to sail on the *Argo*, then very likely he would be able to do so. He might sail on her and perform gestes from her for what seems like three or five or seven years, which is those years according to the chronometer of the *Argo*. But they will not shorten the last minute of his life. They are not contained in that minutes though they may accompany that minute. The minute will still be gone in sixty seconds, and the earthly life will be gone with it. There is no way to play tricks with the Voyages."

"There is a way, right at the end of the voyage," X said. "One has, if he remembers to have, a selection of shores on which to land from the voyage. And one has, if he remembers to have, a selection of years in which to land."

"But he will not remember," the Cardinal said.

"If I remember to remind him, then he will," X maintained.

"No, you will not remember to remind him, and he will not remember to remember," the Cardinal insisted. "It will end when it is supposed to end."

"I remember it now," Duffey said, "how I began the present phase of my life. Ah yes, I had been on the Holy Ship and doing high gestes there. Then my tour of duty was ended there, and I remembered what I might do. I left the ship and came ashore. Well, I was given a short leave (sixty years it was, as it happened) on the shore of my choice. That is what my present lifetime is. It seems as if I have told this same thing in these same words to somebody very recently."

"Not to me," said the Cardinal Salvatore.

"I came ashore, swimming and wading through turbulent water. It was early morning. The shore was muddy with

engendering mud, and full of promise. It was the year 1923, and I was a young man of no more than a quarter of a century of physical years. I went up that muddy shore and entered into the green and burgeoning years of my life. If I remember to do it, I can come back to that same shore, and to that same year, and have another sixty green and burgeoning years to my life. If I remember, I can land on that shore again and once more be a young man of only a quarter of a century of physical years."

"Melchisedech, Melchisedech, if you keep coming back to the same shore, how will you ever reach the other shore where all blessing is?" Cardinal Henri asked. "But if you do relive the sixty green and burgeoning years again, it will still all be in that final minute of your life, and it will not shorten that minute by a second."

"It may be that I am not quite prepared to face that other shore just yet," Melchisedech said.

"I believe that I have been on the *Argo* quite recently," Hans said.

"I know that I have," Marie maintained. "That is why I always wake so refreshed lately."

"One of the latter-day prophetic books, referring to a conclave to be held in the middling near future, dismisses me as being already dead," Cardinal Henri told them. "'Daniel Jean Boule who was the double of the dead Cardinal Salvatore of New Orleans, was coming up from along the Mexican coast in a tramp steamer' it records briefly. That is the only time that I appear in this prophetic piece, and I thought I would play a large part in the conclave."

"For I do not intend to be dead. I intend to be my double's double. I will travel for a while as the double of the dead Dan Boule (he's my cousin, by the way). I will attend the conclave. And I will be a candidate."

"There's another passage in one of the latter-day prophetic books," Teresa said. "And it is (pay attention please, Melchisedech and all) this:

'He also predicted three cargoes that Melchisedech Duffey, in ghostly and bony form, and with a crew of wraiths, would transport on the last voyage of the ship *Argo*, which has had other names. One of these cargoes would be Count Finnegan whom Melchisedech would transport to an obscure place in the Indies where he would be elected and crowned. One of these cargoes would be Prince Casimir whom Duffey would transport to the coast nearest the Vale of Armageddon where this Prince Casimir would reign for a while as Anti-Christ. And the third of the cargoes would be the Parousia Himself, Christ of the Second Coming.'

Have you knowledge of these things that you will do, Melchisedech?"

"I have it not" , Melchisedech Duffey said.

Everything was a bonus in those last days in St. Louis. It was superfluous in the correct old sense of the word which is 'overflowing'. There were extra snails on the thorn, there were extra pigeons in the parks. The years that the cows had eaten were returned green and whole. There was gravy on the goose and huckleberry on the biscuits. Melchisedech had almost forgotten what good people were these several of his Blessed Animations, Teresa and Vincent, Hans and Marie, Henry: were there ever five such genuinely good persons in the world? Had they not rebuilt the world from its sorry state? Was it not better for their having been in it? Did the cranky details matter at all when these larger persons were—

Oh, Duffey had a seizure then, on the third or fourth day of the St. Louis visitation. And he was into the last minute of his normal life. But he was happy to have such pleasant friends at his sudden leave-taking. They would bid him right.

"Remember to ask for the *Argo* again," X said to him.

"On, don't bother his dying," Dame Bagby said. "We will see each other again in shorter time than it has been between our visits last years, Melky."

“It has been fun with you,” Teresa said, “and it will be even more fun the next time.”

6

Melchisedech was strongly into the seventh contingency now. He had been almost here before, again and again. It had been a recurring dream and a recurring speculation of his. It had had the shape of the final expectation.

But it had always been “thus far and no farther” . There had always been a wall between, or a mist as obscuring as a wall. Or it had always been a waking up, or a forgetting, or a complete destruction of mood with a plunging back into hopelessness. But now Melchisedech began at the high point of pleasure and excitement where before he had always broken off.

Melchisedech was walking with the Invisible God in a Garden in the afternoon. There was quite a few thousand other people also walking in that pleasant place, but there was no possibility of crowding, and there was no possibility of any one of them being supplanted or falling out of the Attention. Every one was in special favor here. It was a high fellowship of special favor.

There was total appeal to all fifty-and-five senses, so Melchisedech knew that the scene was genuine. And yet the old senses still held precedence over the new and unpracticed senses.

“You are a special person, Melchisedech,” the Invisible God said, but not in words. “The Melchisedech Paradoxes are at least as wonderful as the Zeno Paradoxes. But every one of my persons is absolutely special and absolutely unique, and every one of them is wrapped in a cluster of wonderful

paradoxes. There is no precedence as to particularity among my special persons."

No, this was not the finality. This was only the anteroom of it. That last second of life still had some while to go. This was dying vision, but not death yet. Here and there, one might see gaps in the green-mantled earth on which they walked, and there was open sky below them, through the gaps. But there was no uneasiness of footing nor fear of falling. Anyone who can walk on water can walk on either caving green earth or on sky with short practice. It was as easy to walk on the flowing sky as on the flowering earth.

Duffey had for mentor Patrick Plunket, that great Irish saint and magician and medical doctor.

"This is mostly Adam Scanlon sod that we are walking over now," Melchisedech told Plunket to show his erudition. "Nobody else could do the muscular greens of sedge grass and fern flower as well as Scanlon, not even Finnegan. I didn't know that he had gone in for landscape animations. For a fact, I didn't know that there was such a field."

"No, Duffey, this is real," Plunket said.

"And I never saw such textured symbolism," Melchisedech Duffey mumbled happily. "There's a very old Arcadian motif here. Then there is glorious sixteenth century Spanish stuff, Teresa, and John of the Cross. And there is twentieth century Jungian influence, transfigured and outdoing itself. The audio components of this mystical symbolism are to be found in the music of—"

"Easy, easy. It's real, Duffey man, it's real," Plunket insisted. "You've a weakness to correct here. You're in love with the contrived. It is for that reason that you have animated various clays, that you have wakened certain quick-earths. You put a lot of symbolism in your marvels, and you're good at it. But in spite of yourself, they turned real on you. And that is over with for you now. Look up from it, man! You're in the Presence of the Real Thing."

"Yes, yes, I know, and it's hard for me to comprehend it all, Pat," Duffey said. "Now it's as though we were ascending a mountain, pleasantly and without great effort. But there is no particular elevation to be seen in this place. But I can feel the elevation, Patrick, and I can taste it."

"It's the invisible Mountain, Melky. It's the interior mountain. We ascend in intensity. We are in the Presence."

"I know we are in the Presence. I have walked in grace three days out of four of my life. Do you think me a stranger to the Presence? But this is a blooming richness that increases in every way. There's a hundred people here that I know and love. And then there are a hundred thousand of them with no lessening of the knowing and loving, and certainly no lessening of the personal acquaintance. How long can it grow better and better?"

"Forever, Duffey. It grows exponentially better forever."

"There's no danger of our losing it, or of it going wrong, is there, Pat?"

"So slight a danger, Duffey, that we will put it out of mind."

"You don't know my mind. There are still uncleansed corners of it, and disoriented curiosities. Ah, here's a pitch of perfect clay, Plunket. I believe that I will just try to make a model of—to try to catch a fraction of this dazzling animation—to imprison a piece of this transitory loveliness in a more permanent!"

"Duffey, thou clod! This is the Permanence Itself that we walk with! There's no need to mould idols."

"You're right, Patrick, you're right. It's an old habit that I find hard to break. A little while ago, I made a dozen splendid animations..."

"No, no, you woke them up only, Duffey. You did not make them. There has been criticism of your attempts to make these things. You did good work, but you thought it other than it was. There is a place for persistent and unrepentant makers. It's a dankish and mud-colored place where the

addicted persons form things, and form them, and form them again and again. It's about the shoddiest section of Purgatory."

"It doesn't sound bad to me at all, Pat. It is far from here? Could we go there now?"

"Duffey, you're walking in the Delectable Place Itself, and our Delectation walks with us! The Potter's Place is on a low and broken way, and it's full of lamentations."

"I suppose so. That's the test of good work. I lament quite a bit myself when I'm in the labor and passion of making. Ah, let's just cut through these thorn hedges!"

"The thorn hedges are out of the direct way, Duffey. They are an obstacle that has to be sought out. They are the only rough going here, and they make us go the long way around to go through them."

"Sometimes I like the rough going and the long way around, Patrick. Just so long as there's no danger of things going wrong, I love the wrong way. You said there was so slight a danger of things going wrong, Patrick, that we could put it out of our minds, but I've not been able to do that. Just how great are the odds against things going wrong?"

"Not nearly as great as they were a while ago, Melchisedech. But come into the green way again, and the odds will increase once more."

"What a curious deformity that branch in the middle of the thorn thicket is! I must..."

"No, you must *not*, man! Leave it alone. It was put in the middle of the thorn thicket so that it would be left alone. There's a billion better and more formly branches in the holy boscage around us. Oh why was I ever assigned to be mentor and guide to a snake-bit Irishman?"

"Look, Pat, it's a mechanical lever of some sort. And the handle of it..."

"No, Duffey, no! *Don't touch it!*"

"I'll touch what I please, good friend. It sets one a-tingle, it does, just to grip it like this. And now I look at it all, at the

fine detail of it. It's seductive, it's beautiful, it's soul-satisfying, and it's symbolically enriching. But is it real?"

"It is Melchisedech, and it will continue to be. And you were real, till you touched that handle. Untouch it, man, and be real again."

"Ah, there's a curious deformity about the handle of this lever. However is that gnarled effect achieved? Fine carving that. It's made of fruit wood, you see. I wonder what the handle activates if I just..."

"Man, don't try to find out! There were a billion billion chances to one against anyone going through those tearing thorn hedges and discovering that handle, and you did it. Let it alone now."

"Well, I have to find out whether all of this is real."

"Turn that handle, you lame-brained Irishman, and you'll find out all too late what's real."

"Too soon or too late, I want to find out. Can even the Presence Itself be a form of temptation to trick me away from the wonderful hewing and moulding place. Tell me, Pat Plunket, what does happen if I turn this handle?"

"The whole bottom falls out from under you!"

Melchisedech Duffey turned the handle, and the whole bottom fell out of things.

"Pat, I'm falling forever!" Melchisedech wailed, and he fell like a scorched rock through the afternoon sky.

"I'll miss you, Melky, but some like it one place and some like it another," Pat Plunkett said.

(No, the last moment of life wasn't over. The last moment of life was hardly begun, barely dented yet. There might have been as much as fifty seconds of it left.) Melchisedech Duffey was sitting in a dung heap, pretty deep in it. His legs and hips had been smashed by the fall, and likely many more bones had been broken. He was in a fetid and half liquid place of miasmas and mists, and storms were beginning to bumble out of the putrid sky above it. And Melchisedech found himself assaulted interiorly and

exteriorly and medially (on and in the covering hide of him) by angry small creatures.

Blister beetles were afflicting him, and horse leeches, and latrine snakes. He was stung by scorpions and infested by midges and crab cooties. Moreover, he suffered from the body flux.

"It's a big change from the beautiful and green sky meadows," he said, "and the end of the fall was a real shocker. Well, well, let's see what can be done about it right now."

Melchisedech banged his hands together, and he groaned in pain. One of his hands was shattered worse than the other, but the best one was not good. A storm churned around him, and whirlwinds were the inhabited fingers of that storm. The sky was garish, gaunt, gray-orange, Gothic.

"It's a Finnegan sky," Duffey said. "I always wondered where he'd gotten it. He's been here, that's what."

Duffey's skin was that of sick and leprous snakes. It wailed and itched wretchedly, and burned like thermite. "I will have to get out of this skin," he said. He took pieces of broken bottles, shards they were, and tore his skin and flesh to rake out the devouring and itching worms.

From far away, a voice was calling "The *Argo*. Remember The *Argo*. You can go to it if you remember that you can go."

"What is The *Argo*?" Melchisedech asked out loud. And then he called more loudly. "What? What? What is it that you're saying?"

Dung rats took savage slices from Duffey, and buzzards plundered him with their knife beaks. Blood snakes came like arrows to the scent of his blood.

"I've always liked these little jogs to the ingenuity," Duffey said. "A man is hard put to do his best work without them." And the livid sky spun and spoke.

"Ah, the whirlwinds, the whirlwinds!" Duffey cried. "That is my kind of talk. And the lightning!"

The whirlwinds were sky-high cyclones. And the lightning split the sky, relentlessly, shriekingly, destroyingly, totally. The thunder was sky-explosive, divinely clattering, rolling, rocking blasts of...

"I laughter. No, not maniac laughter, total-sanity laughter.

"Why, I'm not out of favor at all," Duffey cried. "God in the whirlwind and tempest is not less present than God in the afternoon breeze. I am still in the Presence. I have the best of all worlds."

"The *Argo*, remember The *Argo*," the voice was crying. Not the great voice, a small and mortal voice. "You can go to it if you remember that you can go."

"Why? Will things be better if I go to this *Argo*?" Duffey cried the question.

The broken Melchisedech hands were moving and working now. "It reminds me a lot of that Finnegan picture '*Potting Shed in a Storm*'!" the happy magician said.

(Those who believe that this is only adjunct to the seventh congruency and is not reality are the same people who believed that Melchisedech could not really create. Abjure them.)

"He remembered that I am a magus and that making is what I am best at," Melchisedech gloated. "Why, I have everything here that I need to work with. And worldly distractions are blotted out. *Gloria in Tempestis Deo!*"

There were pieces of broken bottles and jagged metal on this trashy dung heap. The most shapely of them would serve as talismans, and Duffey selected them with his creator's eye. These would work. And the lightning—

"Ah, a million volts should be about right for the infusing," Duffey cried in his joyful labor. "Here's the Muck of Animation. Here's good blood, my own. Here are shapes and forms of all of it dancing in the sky, if I should forget. Bless this lightning! Bless this dungheap! This is the world that I love."

Well, what do *you* think is maintaining the world on even its wobbly ways if it is not the extraordinary work and workmanship of such prodigious and special and creative people?

“Remember The *Argo*!” the voice was calling again. “You can go to it now. And you can leave it for any destination you prefer, if only you remember that you can leave it.”

“Yes, I remember The *Argo* now,” Melchisedech said. “I love it, and I love this work here also. Is there not some way I can have both?”

(No, the last minute of his life wasn't over. The last minute of his life had but a very small hunk taken out of it as yet. There might be as many as forty-nine seconds of it left.)

Melchisedech was reaching out and moulding the rich dung in which he was half-buried. He was moulding it into forms, into marvels (soon they would be Animated Marvels), with his own blood as integument, burning to make, and making — “another dozen even better than the first...”

And the million-volted lightning came down like giant hands to help in the happy making.

Yes, all this was happening. And Melchisedech wouldn't have had it unhappen for anything. But what if he should go around to another thing and then come back to this.

“This happy work will still be here,” he said, “and I suspect that it will be even happier and better when the irritations are removed after I have been tested. This is here forever, but The *Argo* has only one more voyage. I can have both of my delight. I can sail. I can have my intervals of delight on sea and on shore. And I can return to this for my final delight.

“Lord, I am enraptured with this work. Lord I will do this work forever. But not yet.”

Book Thirteen

Argo

"Sine Patre, neque Finem,
Tu Melchisedech ordinum,
Panem proferens et Vinum."

[Bascom Bagby. *Letters After I Am Dead.*]

He, whoever he was, stirred out of a sick sleep into a frozen and fitful fear of falling. He supposed that he was a man of the human sort, as he usually was when he woke up in such a turmoil. It seemed as if he had always had these horrifying awakenings, and now as usual there was a horrifying reason for it.

His stirring had caused him to slip another notch and to dislodge something else of whatever was holding him up. And what had woke him up was the sound of substance falling, through the frozen air, to a very great distance down. He felt insecure, and he realized that most of what he had been lying on had now vanished into space.

He was in a shallow notch of the very high reaches of an ice-coated cliff. And that cliff was slick. There was an icy gale blowing, and ice was falling in glops of many tons, falling and falling for a mile or more. He seemed to be in a sleeping bag that threatened to spill him out upside down. All ice support was eroding and breaking away under him, and the bottom of the cliff was out of sight in the darkness. Whenever he shifted to get into a more safe position, he dislodged more of his support.

"Kaloosh!" came the sound when the first and largest portion of the dislodged snow-ice finally hit far below. He had changed position three times while it fell. It was a thousand meters or more straight down. His head was out

over the abyss and he gawked down into the white darkness.

White darkness? Yes, such frosty surroundings do provide a white darkness at night.

"If I am a man, I can reason," he said, and his voice dislodged still more of his support. His voice had been doing something else, and his out-loud comment had provided a jarring conflict. Now he seemed to be tilting downward on the disappearing icy ledge at an angle of more than sixty degrees. "If I am a man, I can reason," he said soundlessly this time, being careful to set up no disturbance with the vibration of his voice. "If I can reason, I need not be afraid. If I am afraid of such a little thing as death by falling, then it will not matter whether I fall. What falls will be worthless. (Who is singing that damned song?) If I were afraid, it would not be my own heroic self that fell. If it is not my own heroic self, it will not matter whether it dies. There is a person who is trying to remind the me-in-another-place to awaken to further life and to further inventions. He reminds me that I can say to bodily death 'I will go with you, only not yet'. Man, are you ever caught in a 'continued in next chapter' hiatus! The suspense, the suspense! What will we do about the suspense!"

And somebody was still singing that damned song:

"I'm stuck in peril most extreme,
Hi, HO!
Oh morning danger is the theme!
Hi, HO!
My enemies will soon prevail.
Oh where's a bailiff for my bail?
The wind is blowing quite a gale.
My fall will leave me plain un-hale.
I'll bust my head and bust my tail.
Hi, HO! the gollie wol."

Aw, it was himself singing that stuff. It was the galey wind that gave it its strident tone. So he went with another bit.

"It's great to be young and in danger,
Hi, HO!
It's great to be young and in danger."

Then he saw that he was not in a sleeping bag at all, but was wrapped only in half a dozen very long and very warm threads. He recognized them as a few combings from the Original Great Fleece of Colchis. So then, wrapped in no matter how few threads of the great fleece, he could not freeze and he could not fall and he could not die. Aye, he had been hung on the cliff in an impossible position by an almost fatal fall. And he had been left there until the next section of the adventure should begin. This was sky-high adventure serial drama he was in, and it was also real as Ragnarok.

He slipped completely then, as he shifted once more, and slid clear off of the precarious ledge or notch. But then he was dangling by one single golden thread out over the abyss and he knew that he was perfectly safe. He turned a fragment of the fleece outward to show its glint, and this quickly brought an answering glint from the still unrisen sun. The fleece and the sun were brothers. The sun now arose, a little bit early, being wakened by the greeting.

Then the man saw his ship very far below, possibly half a mile. It was frozen solid in blue ice, and three monkey-like figures were romping on the tall and ice-sheeted rigging and rejoicing in the dawn. The man saw the entire earth covered with ice, and he marveled at the solidly-frozen birds hanging motionless in the high air, spread-winged and asleep. It was so cold that all physical forces were frozen up and inoperative.

The man flung gold threads of the great fleece upward and climbed up them towards the top of the ice cliffs. He had spent one day climbing up to his ice station, and now he would move more rapidly. There had been nothing wrong at all. It was just that Argonauts, from the hectic life that they lead, do often wake up scrambled and with lost bearings. The man whistled sharply, and the three monkey-like figures came off the tall rigging of the ice-covered ship and boiled up the slick and frozen cliffs like inverted cascades. They

were wraiths, or at least of a lighter flesh, and they could climb like ascending lightning. They brought ice axes with them, and they were cheerful and ready for any assignment.

Reaching the top of the ice cliff, the man took a work order from the breast of his chlamys and read it. He looked around for what should be there. The three monkey-like seamen had already discovered it and were attacking it with their ice axes. It was a woman frozen in a solid block of ice.

"No job too big, no job too small," the man said in his laughing voice. "Sometimes a dozen jobs a day, from saving a lost cat to saving a lost soul. Oh, this is in the nature of a vacation really, to have been allowed to spend a night on the high cliffs that I love and to carry over the rescue into the bright morning. We appreciate these little leisures when they come to us. And there is probably a reason for drawing her out of the ice."

The woman was ivory-fair, and her veins as shown through her flesh and the ice were sky blue. The lids of her closed eyes were also of this gentle and ghostly blue, as was the web-like flesh between her toes. The man attacked the encasing pillar of ice as the monkey creatures also were doing. They hacked and split great hunks out of the pillar and quickly sculptured it down almost to the woman.

The woman woke up, and her blue eyes darted here and yon, following the bladed axes. She grinned with her eyes at the magus (the man had already remembered that he was a magus and he was quite close to remembering his own name; morning forgetfulness was only a temporary thing to one piloting the Ship Itself). The woman grinned with her eyes at the monkey-like creatures also, and they echoed grins back at her. Her people and theirs had once been in close league. There would be complete accord throughout this whole company. The woman seemed to be as near akin to the scampering simians as she was to the magus himself.

The woman cringed with mock horror whenever the axes came too near to her, and she grimaced broadly when, now

and then, an axe came absolutely too close and bit her flesh to send out little red gushets on the inside of the ice. These things do happen, however canny is the wielder of the axe. The woman was probably beautiful, and she was wrapped in the blond skin of a female cave-bear. There were primordial and archaic aspects to her appearance, but both the man and the monkey creatures smiled to show that they liked her and the way she looked.

"How did you know where I was?" she talked out of the ice when a crack in the pillar of it allowed her to move her chinless jaw. She spoke with human sound but not with usual words. It was the vocalized thought-speaking that primordial persons use so easily and understand so universally. Later in the morning she would be using usual words, all of the early people being fast learners. She had a swept-back face that was a bit fish-like, and a bit teras-like, and a bit troll-like. Nice looking, but behind that face she was toothed more massively than are most of the people you know.

"I had a work order to come and get you and wake you up," the man said, "What a way to run a hotel! Someone leaves an order with the desk clerk to be wakened in forty thousand years and it might not even be the desk clerk on duty when that time comes around. And it was a hard cold journey to come for you. Why couldn't you have used an alarm clock like anyone else?"

"Oh poor you," the woman said, and a lot of her was already out of the ice. She used words at random, but the expressions and messages were clear enough. "I almost feel sorry for you," she was saying, "but I know that you can't really be cold with those golden combings on you. We had heard about them, but we could never find them. Oh poor monkey faces too! But you don't resent having to come and get me, not when we are such good friends as we really are."

"When I'm running the *Argo* (that's the name of the Ship frozen in the ice below us there), I have quite a few of these

work orders to fill," the magus said. "I never know where they come from or why, and some of them do not seem to have much reason. This is the ship that can go where no other ship would ever reach, the ship that can find places that would otherwise be lost forever. But I like to understand my missions as well as I may. Who are you?"

"Ewaglouwshkoul, of course," said the fair woman with that pleasant big-mouthedness that so many of the older families have. "Who did you think I was?"

"Oh, Little Eva, yes, of course. There's one in every era."

"The Neanderthal Eve, I suppose they would call me, using your own words," she said, beginning herself to use a few real words mixed in with her thought-speaking. "It would be a sort of nickname. But I'm not the first woman of my tribe. I'm the last, I guess. There was only myself, and I under-aged, and thirteen of our fellows left, and things were going badly with us. Every day we went out to fight and every day we got whipped. Then our ghostly mentor suggested that some of us should go into cold storage for a very long time, and we would be awakened when things looked more peaceful. I decided that I would go into freeze, and the thirteen fellows all took different courses of action. One or two of them went into freeze also, I think. And some others of them may have survived somewhere. If not, it's a real loss. We have so much to give. I'm sure that there are a lot of my half-blood kindred around, but we'd like to preserve the real thing if we could. Pride in stock, and all of that. I was about to say that everybody knows me, but the everybodies who knew me are mostly dead by now. Since I am returned and refreshed and awake, I will immediately set about the business of having children. They are needed."

"Don't look at me," the man said. "I'm a holy magus. I can't get involved in such things, certainly not with a client on whom I have a work order."

"Oh no, I didn't mean you. It will have to be one of the real ones if possible. But how will I go about it? I'm of an

unfallen nature, and besides I'm pretty *naïve*. I was only a child, really, when I had them freeze me in this ice block. I should have a designated mate, but any of the thirteen would do if one of them were still alive. And there may have been other bands of us who survived somewhere. I don't know whether there is any chance of that or not."

"Were people of other bands also frozen in ice blocks?"

"No. Not all of them anyhow. The report was that most of them said they would tough it out. But I guess that most of them are gone after these forty thousand years. Do you know where there are any more of my kind?"

"No, not exactly," the magus said. "But I believe I do know where there are several half-bloods. And I know where there are a few Groll's Trolls, and they are pretty nearly the same thing. I'm all for the revival of the more talented of the old races. Things were getting a little bit bland without you."

"Does your work order say what you're supposed to do with me, holy magus?"

"It just says to release you from the ice and wake you up, and to take you to any sea port in the world that you designate."

"Do you have very many other work orders today?"

"No. Just a few. I am to pick up a man who has been waiting thirty years for this ship to come. We make a lot of mistakes, but he's a patient man and I believe that he's been enjoying himself. Besides, he's one of our group. He is a Master of the Ship himself. I will just pick him up in a sea port a third of the way around the world, and then he will travel with me on a tour of duty. He is an accomplished seaman, as I am."

"Which sea port is it, magus?"

"Biloxi. It's in Mississippi."

"Those are names that sound a little bit like our kind of talk. Take me there too then. I don't know much about the different ports you have now. Some of the ports we had would be underwater now, and some of them would be on

the mountain tops. If Biloxi is a cosmopolitan place, then there will be seamen of every sort who will come there. I will pick me out one who is the closest to my blood. Soon or late some such will turn up. I'll get me a saloon or a hotel where everybody passes, and finally one of them will come. Papa ran a waterfront place named 'The Old Stone Ship'. We invented ships and seamen, you know. I will find some of my folks somewhere, no matter where I start. And I will save you a trip if you let me off at a port where you are already going."

They all went down the great ice cliff. They blasted the ship out of the ice, and they blasted a passage for it. They opened up a fresh water stream with their explosives, and they filled their water casks from the stream. They gathered dead fish from their blasting and filled their stores. They killed blond cave bears to get bear grease to soften and make supple their frozen lines, and to give a new bear cloak to Eva. The old one was shedding after forty thousand years in the ice. They weighed anchor, and they sailed.

"This ship sails against the wind, doesn't it?" Eva asked as they were high-seaing it along. "Do you want it that way, or do you just not know any better?"

"This is the best way, for the *Argo*," said the magus-man. "It's just like a kite that will rise best against the wind. It goes against the wind and against the waves, and did you ever see a ship move so smoothly and rapidly?"

"Oh often, magus, often," Eva said. "We had such ships, surely, but I was not expecting to see the more degenerate people having them. You've come a long way while I was asleep. It must be a very interesting sort of life, filling every different kind of work order."

"It's quite interesting, Eva. I foresee that I will die while filling one over-interesting order soon, but that is to be expected. But it's a pleasant life, and I do meet interesting people. And now I begin to remember most of it about myself. But sometimes, as one becomes younger, it takes

longer to recollect oneself in the morning. But now it all comes to me.”

They sailed against the winds and currents to Biloxi.

2

“I will no more believe that there is a do-good ship sailing under the flag of the Kingdom of Colchis, under patent of Divine Intervention, crewed by ancient remnants of the Argonauts and by black giants, sailing cavalierly through time and space and tampering with the future than I will believe in Divine Intervention Itself. Both the Ship and the Divine Interventions are conceits of Melchisedech Duffey the mountebank. But belief in the Ship Argo seems to have become cult belief of the month.”

[Elwin K. Elkheart, Secretary-General of WSMA (affiliate of WSMAASRTFM).]

The magus had now attained such clarity that he remembered his own name. He was Melchisedech Himself, the King of Salem, the ship pilot extraordinary, art dealer and life expert and sometime lover, adventurer into futures, and righter of wrongs. In latter-day contexts, he was sometimes named Melchisedech Duffey. He considered about the three monkey-like or wraithlike seamen who served him; and they were persons that, to some extent, he had made himself. And there were many more than three of them. There were others in the galley, and off-duty here and there. They were good seamen, when actual seamen were not always to be had. Then Duffey considered the ship that he was sailing, the ship that had several times borne the name of the *Argo*.

Melchisedech had never completely understood this ship, though it was flesh of his flesh and ghost of his ghost. For all of the dozens of different times that he had sailed on her, he could still get lost on her. He could not even be sure how many masts she had: she had as many as were needed for any voyage, and funnels too sometimes. And, also, she had engines, whether or not it was proper that she should have

them. There were unfamiliar apartments and mansions on the ship. Sometimes there were cavernous holds with stanchions and stalls for the many nameless animals quartered in them. There were doors to which Melchisedech had no key, and he was not even able to count the number of decks on her. And yet, from a slight distance, she seemed trim and complete and almost small.

Melchisedech would sometimes come into fascinating and memorable rooms and ward rooms and halls on the *Argo*, and he would not be able to find those same places again. He would come to rooms where large numbers of persons were talking and discussing gravely; he would find places where groups of families, all unknown to him, were living. And there were booths and shops and stores on the ship, and even cottage industries were carried on. Nobody really had any good idea of the size of the ship. The Bible gives dimensions of one sort in the Vulgate and of another sort in the Septuagint, and perhaps a third sort in the Hebrew. And there are any number of different cubits, from nine inches to thirty-nine: and who can say which cubit is intended? At berthing, the *Argo* would go into very small slips designed for boats and not ships. And yet she would sometimes stand up as tall and long as any craft on the ocean.

There was an intimate room, 'The Bread and Wine Room' on the *Argo*. Very meaningful gatherings were sometimes held there. But, as to the present *Argo*, she was surely much smaller than once she had been. There was even the opinion that the present *Argo* was only the ship's boat or the pinnacle of the Great Ship Itself. And yet it carried all the relics and identifications of the great ship: the wheel itself with the piece of the 'talking oak' set into it, the molar of Noah buried in a ship's plank where he had bit down and broken it off in exasperation at the irritations of the voyage, the cote of the Special Dove (it isn't always remembered that this was a prodigious dove with a wing span of more

than ten feet), the grist mills and the grain grinders that had been on the big ship for the feeding of all aboard. And the name, and the log book itself, were preserved there. So was the original lantern, the lantern that was so constructed that it would shine around headlands and promontories and corners and show what was beyond them, this while the ship was still a good distance from them.

It was the piece of talking oak in the ship's wheel that would give the history of the ship when it was questioned. The ship, after it had been the *Argo* or variants of the name those first few times, had been the *Navicula Petri* or Peter Ship, and it served both as a fishing skiff and as a salvation ship. It had been the Anthony Ship at Actium and had been shamed there. It had been the flagship of the great Abd-Aliah of the Sea, and the famous daughter of Abd-Aliah had ridden on her. (Who does not love the description of Abd-Aliah's beautiful daughter. "She had a face round like the moon, and long hair and heavy hips, and black-edged eyes and a slender waist, but she had a tail" ?). Abd-Aliah of the Sea sold the Ship to Sindbad of El-Basrah.

There was still a stunning Sindbad Lounge or drinking bar on the *Argo*, to be in which was like being down underneath sun-drenched water with the air filled with fishes, and with sands like gold. And yet these decorations and appointments were much later than Sindbad's own ownership. The magnificent and oceanic paintings in the lounge were, in fact, painted by Count Finnegan in his youth. That was at a time when the Ship was named the *Brunhilde* and was owned by evil men. The Holy Argo had the strumpet habit of coming into the ownership of infidels.

The *Argo*, at different times in its sun-drenched and sea-drenched history, had carried such diverse notables as St. Paul, and the Crusader Godfrey of the Gate, and Mark Twain.

The ship had been named '*Land of Behest*'. When St. Brandon sailed her from Ireland to America that first time, when he had encountered the great fish *Jascoyne* in her,

when he had carried the traitor Judas in her (and Judas was not the most hellish passenger ever to travel on the ship).

The *Argo* had once been a Saracen Ship, but she had been recaptured from the Saracens by King Richard of England. She was named *Salle du Roi* when Robert of Namur sailed her for another King of England. She was named the *Flying Serpent* when Willy Jones sailed her in the Moluccas, and the *Catherine* when Dana Coscuin took her around the Horn. This is only part of the history of the ship that was given by the piece of talking oak to anyone who asked. And there were also whole rooms full of old log books of old voyages, some of which lasted for centuries.

Melchisedech had the opportunity all that morning of reviewing the history of his great ship, there being no one with him on this gusty trip a third of the way around the world except the effigy seamen of his own shaping and the beautiful woman whom he had taken out of the pillar of ice that morning. And this woman was of an unfallen nature and was naïve besides, and beside she was too young for him, even in his new green and youthful cycle. And yet there were many people on the *Argo* unbeknownst to Melchisedech, and some of these made themselves manifest during the morning.

The unaccountable people seemed to be attracted to Eva and her luxury bear skin wrapper and her fair ways. She was very popular, even though she had been out of things for quite a few years. And so had some of the mysterious passengers been out of things for a long time. Everyone who had ever traveled on the *Argo* had left enough of his essence on her to be able to make a wraithy return to her at any time. Some of these passengers were curiously dated, but others were as current as the day.

Melchisedech was one of the very special persons who sometimes served as pilot of the *Argo*. There are certain persons, and Melchisedech was one of them, who live extraordinarily long lives. And they must pay for their length

of days with extraordinary service. The purpose of the *Argo* was to sail anywhere in the world and to haul passengers and cargo that would be too dangerous for other ships to handle; to open up dark lands and ports; and to break up secret plots and conspiracies. It was also intended to bring joy and grace to dark places, and to provide entertainment. It was, in the primary sense, a show boat. And she was also the 'Hope Ship' for unfortunates. "The *Argo* will come" was a promise among the promises.

There had never been another ship that knew *all* the seas and islands and mains and promontories (each one with its own goat) of the world, and all the salty sea port towns and raffish ports of call. The *Argo* also knew all the migrating islands, and all the (still more rare) migrating seas that travel yearly from north to south with all their birds and fish.

What other ship had sailed *all* the seas: the Timor Sea and the Savu Sea and the Arafura Sea? She had even, according to one old log on her, sailed the *Mare Nectaris*, and that is on the moon. What other ship had prowled the Molucca Sea and the Ceram Sea and the Banda Sea? What ship had sailed the Java and the Flores and the Bali, the South China and the Andaman and the Coral, the Solomon and the Tasman and the Philippine, the Mindanao and the Visayan and the Sibuyan, the Japan Sea and the East China Sea and the Yellow Sea, the Okhotsk and the Bering and the Kara, the Arabian and the Malabar and the Oman, the Ionian and the Aegean and the Marmora? What memories did these not bring back to Melchisedech, for he had sailed on every one of those. And those were only drops of water in the ocean of all the seas that had been sailed by the *Argo*.

What other ship had visited *all* the shores of that most mysterious of all seas, the Sea of the Seven Lost Years?

But do not ask too closely about that Sea of the Lost Years. There were a lot of things about that most strange of all seas that neither Melchisedech nor any of the other Pilots or Captains of the *Argo* understood. It was not always a

contiguous sea. In many ways, it was like the migrating seas. Channels of it ran in the midst of other waters, and some of its shores seemed to be very far inland. They seemed to be river shores and even lake shores at times, rather than sea shores.

There had been one very early morning in Melchisedech's youth, in his fifth or sixth youth, really, when Melchisedech had walked out onto the river shore in St. Louis, just below the Eads Bridge, and had walked right on to a low-lying boat. And it had been the the *Argo* in disguise. Melchisedech had then traveled on that ship for seven years, but not all of it consecutively with much time out for land adventures (the land adventures do not count in the Seven Lost Years, and neither are they deducted from the years of life).

Melchisedech still encountered many stray days out of the Seven Lost Years, and today may have been one of them. Some of those days were separated from others by very wide spaces in between. And there is another body of water (or anyhow of fluid), the Sea of Amnesia, that is connected with the Seven Lost Years by a hidden strait.

No, no, there was nothing at all notable going on aboard the *Argo* this morning, except a lot of loud hornpipe music and some carousing and singing and laughing, with Eva and some other girls discovered somewhere on the ship having a lot of fun with fellows of uncertain origin. Back to the memories, Melchisedech. Nothing at all is going on here.

Sea Islands, Mains, Promontories or Capes, Waterfronts. There have been some great waterfront places. Remember the *Fanged Fish* at Ogopo and the *Benevolent Shark* at Maule? Or the *Drowned Whale*, or *Costerman's Whalers' Inn* or *Octopus Joe's*, or *Salty Dog's Shack-Up House*, or the *Rusty Harpoon*, or *O'Brien's Polynesian Palace*, *Ching Ling Charley's Doss House*, the *Barbary Ape*, the *Sulu Ritz*, *Harold's Blow Fish Ball Room*, the *Sand Flea*, *Biddy's Barracuda Bar*, the *Beacon Club*, *Kate's Neanderthal Bar*, the...

“I wonder if *Kate's Neanderthal Bar* in Biloxi is for sale?” Eva asked Melchisedech about the time he came to that place in his catalog of memories. It was almost as if she had been reading his mind. She was flushed a bit, from the rapid dancing and carrying on, but always she had her mind open for business. “One of the seamen says that there's always a few of my kind of people around *Kate's Neanderthal*. That's the kind of place I will have to have. If any of my kind of people are around, then they will come in there sooner or later.”

Eva was speaking pretty well now and was using regular words. The Neanderthals (and the Neo-Neanderthals, of whom Eva was one), on account of their funny shaped heads, have an odd word emphasis in the brain, and considerable verbal dexterity. They speak all languages easily, or they seem to. And they read words out of minds as easily as anyone else would read any other thing off of a printed page.

“We will see whether it is for sale,” Melchisedech said. “I believe that *Kate's Neanderthal Bar* is almost always for sale. But what would you do with it?”

“I'd name it *Eva's Neanderthal Bar*, and I'd run it. It would be a neat place. We ran the first waterfront places, you know.”

“I dispute you,” Melchisedech said, “but they are in the origins of all of us. When the first people came up out of the first ocean to try to live on land, they sat on the shore to rest and to think about the momentous thing they were doing. And, as they sat there, somebody (probably he was half-person and half-octopus) brought them a platter of stewed oysters and a bottle of ‘Sulu Sea Five Star Whisky’. Then the people, their tongues loosened and their gills flopping and themselves a little bit light in the head from breathing air, began to tell lies, or sea stories as they are sometimes called. These salt water lies formed an essential station in the peoples’ coming out of the sea and onto land, in their

becoming separate persons instead of the person-in-pieces colony that drifts through all the seas. The story is essential to personhood. Everyone in the world has been told about in story before he comes to live in the non-oceanic flesh. And every story in the world was first told in one of those waterfront places. Except, that is, and of course, those stories that were first told on the Holy Argo Herself."

"Oh magus man, you are a talker," Eva said, "but the first of the people places were run by my own people. All the better ones were, at least. On every waterfront, there was always an inferior place next door and it was run by a Groll's Troll, and then there was the superior place run by our folks. We always served better stuff and had better music and told better stories than the Groll's Trolls did. They are only a short cut above *you* folks. But we should all love each other since we are all cousins.

"I will have to get a consignment of tall talk ready for my taking over that place. Nothing interesting ever happens to me, me being in the frost chest for so long, and all that. But I will make up tall stories and say that they happened to me. I will do that if I run the *Neanderthal*. Come and see me there. Where can I get some business cards printed?"

"There is a little print shop on the *Argo* somewhere. I forget just where it is, but you might find it."

"Oh, I think I know where it is. And I can find anything," Eva said.

The *Argo*, still sailing resolutely against the waves and the winds, came to dock in Biloxi Mississippi about noon on that blessed day. The sandpipers of Horn Island and the Gulls of Ship Island had made a glad noise about it as the *Argo* went in to dock. And there was news about an event arriving on that ship.

Every sea-fooder in Biloxi put on another hundred dozen oysters. Every barbecue in town threw another hog in the

pit. It would be a lively night that night, with rejoicing, and the reason for it would be more felt than known.

When the hundredth sheep which has been lost is found, there is gala. But when the hundred and first sheep that has been both lost and forgotten appears again, then there is a little special feel about the things. One of the older families was, possibly, going to be reestablished. That was cause enough for celebration.

Besides that, two Argo Masters who had not seen each other for a long time were going to be reunited.

3

Melchisedech Duffey sat and talked with Biloxi Brannagan in Brannagan's private beer garden that afternoon. Biloxi's wife Gertrude kept the pitchers filled and the various plates heaped up to show that she cared.

"Biloxi has been sitting in that same chair, waiting for the Ship to come, for thirty years," Gertrude Brannagan said. "He says that after you are three thousand years old, thirty years is hardly any time at all. The only time he ever gets up is to go to the bathroom. He doesn't even come in the house when it rains. He says it won't rain on him, and it doesn't. He has the rain here under interdict. It's afraid of him. I've often told him that I thought he had missed the Ship, that it must have been in and out of the port while he was sleeping. But he says that he never sleeps, and I don't believe that he does. Oh well, he's never what you'd call very wide awake either. I told him that perhaps he had not left a call for the Ship, or that it had been forgotten. But he insisted that he had left a call, and that calls for that Ship are never forgotten."

"Aye, he left a call," Duffey said, "but it was marked 'No Hurry'."

"And thirty years is certainly no hurry," Gertrude agreed. "Well, I've enjoyed having him all these years, sort of, though there have been a few things lacking. I don't know a more pleasant man anywhere than Biloxi Brannagan."

Brannagan had sandy hair with only a token touch of patriarchal gray mixed in. He could have passed for thirty years old, so 'waiting for the *Argo*' is not a very aging experience. He had the powerful forearms and clear eyes of an old-style seaman. There was much that was lion-like about both his forearms and his eyes. He would look any man in the world straight in the eye. And he would wither any jackal with a look out of the corner of his eye. He was a cobbler, a digger, a man from Australia. Duffey, in years gone by, had given a talisman to this Brannagan, and this talisman had had its part in the birth of Marie Monahan who was sister's child to Brannagan.

And, as to Gertrude Brannagan, there is an old document that describes her:

"Gertrude was herself a fortress. She was a gulf state lady of forty-five years old, give or take fifteen years either way. She was full-built and pretty, dark and a little bit Frenchy, curly of hair and smile, voluted and parapeted." She was one of those friendly and smoochy ladies, and she kissed both Biloxi and Melchisedech every time she brought something else to the table.

"Wherever did you get that pretty Neanderthal girl, Duffey?" she asked. "I never saw so fine a complexion. I wonder where she got it?"

"From the ice," said Duffey. "The ice gives that ivory-like complexion with those ghostly touches of blue."

"Does she use ice packs for her skin? I thought that ice packs were outish lately."

"No. She used an ice pillar. She was frozen in a pillar of ice. She had been there quite a few ages. We chipped her

out of the ice this morning, but she didn't have to thaw. She is one of those naturally warm persons. She says that she doesn't feel the cold at all."

"What are the theological implications?" Gertrude asked, "with her being of an unfallen race and all? If they increase again, will that not make the rest of us look pretty sorry?"

"I'm sure that this been worked out," Duffey said. "Several of them seem to have been put into cold storage, and every few centuries another one is cracked out to make a contribution to the gene pool. It will not be a disturbing thing till they reach a level of about one in ten thousand. But they bring a nice touch into the mixture, an aroma that we nearly forget sometimes. But it's only a popular legend (which they themselves believe) that they are an unfallen people."

"Mr. Duffey, I think that that is interesting," Gertrude said, "and you told me that nothing interesting had happened to you all day. Finding a girl who has been frozen in a pillar of ice for thousands of years is very interesting."

"Which voyage is this that we go on now, Duffey?" Brannagan asked. "I lose count."

"On, it's the fourteenth voyage of the *Argo*," Melchisedech said. "Argo Fourteen."

"That sounds like one of those cosmic clock dating methods," Gertrude said, "like Carbon Fourteen and such."

"And the *Argo* is a dating clock, among very many other things," Duffey told her. "Anything within the last nine thousand years, or the next sixty-seven years, is all written down pretty clearly in the *Argo's* log. It's all there, but sometimes one must be sharp about reading it. Part of the interpretation depends on Interior Illumination."

"You've got a lot of that, have you, Duffey?" Gertrude joshed him. "I have a lot of Interior Illumination myself. But why does the log go only sixty-seven years into the future?"

"Most logs do not go into the future at all, so this is in the *Argo's* favor, however far it goes. But in this case, I think

that — ah — I get the impression that that's all the farther the future goes. Or else the future moves into some other context about then. There is a note in the log that certain futures or parts of futures, after a jog or a dislocation, are to be found written in a different log book, though pretty much in the same hands. Now I have seen this different ledger or log book, and I have held it in my hands, but I cannot always find it just when I want to. There's an instruction in the chart room of the *Argo* telling how to find this other log book, but I cannot always find this instruction, and I cannot always, to be honest with you, even find the chart room.

“But there are several other ways in which the *Argo* acts as a dating clock. If one brings any artifact at all on board and touches it to the piece of talking oak that is built into the ship's wheel, that talking oak will call out the year of origin of the piece in whatever aeon or era it belongs, and in whatever annals of the era. But sometimes the talking wood becomes confused. It may call out bearings instead of times, degrees and minutes and seconds of latitude and longitude which do not always have anything to do with the artifact brought to it.

“But the future, or a future, does go beyond the sixty-seven years, Gertrude, and I have been beyond that point into the future. It becomes different beyond that point, though, quite different.”

“Then this is the thirteenth voyage of the *Argo* that you came in on today, Duffey, and you will take Brannagan on the fourteenth voyage tonight?”

“No, Gertrude, no. These individual trips aren't voyages, even if we may carelessly call them so. Each voyage is a cycle of trips or adventures, a dynasty of adventures. And a voyage is halted only by hiatus or mutation, or by one of the ‘deaths’ of the Ship. The Ship may be lost and found again several times on one of the voyages. The *Argo* was lost completely before my last several trips. I found her again by accident and intuition. I walked down to visit a sly hull

dealer in New Orleans and he said that he had something to show me. I had put out the word that I wanted to see something in old hulls, hulks, or even complete ships. This hull was afloat and light in the water, and my heart leapt up to see it. But it didn't look anything like the *Argo*.

“ ‘The hull is of oak,’ the dealer told me. ‘It's unusual for there to be an oaken hull this old. Oak is the noble wood of legend, but in practice it is usually too crooked and cranky for ship building: and too hard, and with no real spring to it. It will break before it will bend, and that's intolerable in ships' timbers. But this old hull seems to have plenty of spring in her. She is very, very old, but she is worm-free.’ ‘I know,’ I said, and I told the dealer a bit about her: ‘Her keel was laid at Ragusa on the Adriatic, and she is built of oak from the Dinaric Alps. If she had been laid in a Black Sea port, she would have been, at that distant time, built of cedar. But she's oak. She even has built into her several pieces of the talking oak named — no, I'll not name that special oak. But she talks, man.’ ‘She talks, yes,’ the sly hull dealer said, ‘I've heard her. Shall I have her fitted for you, and how will it be financed?’ ‘She'll fit herself,’ I said, ‘She has but to remember all her fittings and she'll have them again.’ And so it was. The above, though not an accurate account by common standards, is accurate symbolically.

“Could I ride on her?” Gertrude asked. “I'm oak myself. Live-oak.”

“Any time, before late this night,” Melchisedech told her. “There are seamen on her who are like monkey-shaped wraiths, but if they like you —”

“They will like me,” Gertrude said. “All wraithy things like me.”

“Oh then, they'll take you on a crisp and fast trip around all the little islands. She's in singing shape, the *Argo*. This is a sort of climax voyage we're on, the Fourteenth.”

“Brannagan says that you tamper with history and with events on the voyages,” Gertrude said. “He says that things

would be in bad shape if you didn't interfere so judiciously. I say that things are in judiciously bad shape now. What do you do, sail backwards in time and destroy the seeds of dire events before they can grow?"

"Backwards in time!" Brannagan gasped. "Have I an insane wife, and have I only discovered it on my last day with her? You shame my bald hairs, woman."

"Backwards in time!" Duffey gasped. "That is the most brainless thing I've ever heard of. It sounds like a science fiction idea or a blatt-brained notion. How would anyone ever voyage backwards in time?"

"Well then, you little nimble noggins, where *do* you voyage to?" Gertrude asked.

"Forward into time or sideways in time," Brannagan said. "Into the future or into the present. We are already going forward in time, and we have only to accelerate a thousand-fold (that's critical speed for a time trip to the future to do it). But there is no way that one could go back in time."

"And there is no way that we could change things if we did go backwards," Duffey said. "We cannot change the past that has already happened. But we can change the present in the process of happening, by being a part of that happening. And often we can change the future which has not already happened. But not all our piety or wit will blot out any line of the past. Besides, we have already lived through the past, or died from it. Let us go on to other things."

"But changing the future won't help the present," Gertrude objected.

"It's the best that can be done," Duffey told her. "Every attempt to get the people to change the present to improve the future has been a dismal failure, though it would be the best way if it worked. But there is a very great amount of spill-back from the future into the present. Almost all of the worst effects of the present come from the future, and the future is continually turning into the present. The future is

trial balloon country. Some of the balloons are mighty evil, and if they are not shot down at once they will drift into reality. Prescient types see some of the things that are trying to become, and we do what we can about them. We are constantly moving out in front and making changes in things before they happen. Brandon, the time before last when I sailed with you, were you not St. Brandon of Ireland?"

"Certainly, I was and I am St. Brandon of Ireland. To be St. Brandon once is to be St. Brandon forever."

"But so is it also that to be a priest once is to be a priest forever. 'Thou art a priest forever according to the order of Melchisedech.' Myself, I belong to an obscure oriental rite where marriage has always been permitted. But with the Irish priests it was not so. So how do you square all that with your life with Gertrude here?"

"Gertrude is a holy woman and a merry one," Biloxi Brannagan said, "and we get along high and fine. She has been set to minister to me in this little beer garden which is like a piece of paradise."

"Well, I'm glad to know that it wasn't me," Gertrude said. "Thirty years I've been worried about the affair and wondering where I've failed. But if there has been this impediment all the time, why that explains it."

Biloxi and Gertrude had a better home life than do many of the patriarchs and Argo Masters. Usually they do not remember their sailing on the *Argo* at all during the times when they are on shore. They do not remember it, but it overshadows their daily life. It makes that daily life seem a little bit trivial, and they do not give it the attention that it deserves. The Argo Master will sometimes be listless in his months and years on shore, and then people will say 'He is waiting for his ship to come in. He is no good for anything while he waits.'

Along about then, Eva, the beautiful and archaic young Neo-Neanderthal lady came to them with a lopsided proposition.

"Does either of you gentlemen have fourteen thousand dollars that you don't need right now," she asked. "I can make a solid down on the *Neanderthal Bar* for fourteen thousand dollars cash on the barrelhead. I can buy *Kate's Neanderthal Bar* just the way it is, and I'm sure I can make a go of it. And if I get a mate out of it, we'll settle here and give Biloxi a more old fashioned flavor than it's ever had before. Consider it as a civic investment and as a broadening of the base of things."

Melchisedech Duffey rubbed his two hands together, and two hundred and eighty of the old fifty dollar gold pieces cascaded onto the table with fine old music.

"There is something so boyish about all you sorcerers," Gertrude commented.

"I'll say so," Eva agreed. "But it's going to look fishy, my bringing in two hundred and eighty of these fifty dollar goldies. People will think I've robbed a Swiss bank. And I don't think there were any such things as fifty dollar gold pieces in the years shown on these, though they are real gold. When I was a kid, there was a lot of gold around on the ground that hadn't been washed down by the streams yet. Don't you have any green stuff?"

Biloxi Brannagan rubbed his hands together, and one hundred and forty of good one hundred dollar bills thumped onto the table in a bundle banded together with rubber bands. Eva undid the bundle and examined the bills with her sparkling fingers and her sparkling blue eyes. "These are good," she said after a moment, "but people will challenge them as fakes if I push this many of them all at one time. They all have the same serial number. Can you make them with a hundred and forty different serial numbers?"

"It's a hundred and forty times is hard that way, Eva," Brannagan said, "and when we manufacture something by mind-power alone, well, there's a limit to mind power. It would take me about a week to do it that way, Eva. I'd have to rest in between times."

“Well, what will I do?” Eva asked. “What if Kate sells the *Neanderthal* to some simpleton while we're fooling around here? I need the *Neanderthal*. It's the best place ever for meeting some of my own kind and getting things going again.”

“Don't fret, Eva,” Gertrude said. “We just have to work around these damned sorcerers if we're going to get anything done. We'll take care of it ourselves. Wait till I go in the house and get my checkbook.”

4

About those crewmen on the *Argo*, why they were there to work as crewmen, of course. Sure, they were as robotic as the zombie devil himself, only not cute. They were not really wraiths or effigies. They were place tokens.

They were notices which said in effect, ‘This is my place, until I come once more to fill it. Respect my place as you would respect me.’ The ghostly mechanical ‘crewmen’ were the residues of persons who had sailed on the *Argo*, who would sail on her again, and who would always have the right to sail on her. There were quite a few of these token residues on the ship, and the ship couldn't have operated without them, seamen's wages being what they are.

Indeed, when Melchisedech Duffey and Biloxi Brannagan were not on the *Argo* themselves, their animate memories or notices or residues were there. And these memory residues were materialized and programmed to do a little happy work. So these monkey-like things were the old crewmen themselves, as much of them as could be left behind for identification and service. And one could discern, or at least guess with reasonable probability, what great *Argo* Master was represented by each of them.

Melchisedech and Biloxi had been going into the future to root out things that might spill back into the present, and to have some of those evils already cleared out of the way when that future might have become the present.

This day, they had a work order to prevent a rumored evil or distaste of an extreme sort. It was really a little bit funny to consider just what it was, but hell was roofed and timbered by such pervertedly funny things. It was something so vile that it was hard to see how humans could possibly tolerate it, and yet samplings from the future showed humans not only accepting it but reveling in its gustatory depravity. Comics of the past and present had already brought it into their swampy humor, and they were grooming the future to accept it. Some of these were good but randy people, and they did not realize what they were doing.

Henry Salvatore, a fat Frenchman of the Louisiana swamps, a man known to both Melchisedech and Biloxi Brannagan, had used to tell stagnant swamp stories. And the most distasteful thing in any of his stories was the damnable Puff Fish. Henry told about people who *ate* the things. There was no way that anybody was ever going to get all the swamp country humor out of Henry. Other people have also referred to this coming abomination in a spirit of misguided humor. Swamp stories will always refer either to things of the past or present or future, and there were no Puff Fish in the past or the present. The very idea of them was rancid. The possibility of people really eating them was horrifying. They were in every water, so the story went, and they were only waiting till somebody would find the bait they would bite on. Oh what bait would be horrible enough for the horrible Puff Fish?

The future that they might be in was getting closer, so there was nothing to do except to go forward into the future and root them out and save the world from that shameful era.

It was on the futuristic trail of the Puff Fish that the *Argo*, on a sunshiny day, was apparently sailing through a sea of grass in waterlogged rural Louisiana. The *Argo* was really sailing down one of those weed and reed grown canals. The Masters of the Ship brought the *Argo* to a little landing in the swamp, and they tied up there. They were met by three brackish water gentlemen, Leonard Archive, Oliver Greenflag, and Harry A. (Honeybucket) Kincaid, three pleasant and hospitable persons.

"We have everything here that you salty travelers might need or name," Leonard Archive said. "Name it."

"It's to destroy the naming or needing of one foul thing that we are here," Biloxi Brannagan said. "But, as to your hospitable invitation, bring me a nine pound gar. Then flense about three pounds off the tender flanks of it and grill it."

"I'll have about a fourteen pound Blooper Fish," Melchisedech Duffey said. "You should be able to get about fourteen pounds of good head steak from a fellow that size."

Honeybucket Kincaid set certain dials for voltage and frequency, and threw the power. He also made slight adjustments to the underwater electrodes, but that was just because he loved to fiddle with them. For small jobs, it didn't matter how deep in the water the electrodes were.

The green of the channels was literally galvanized into life. The water meadows, thick with both rooted and free-floating flora, showed white wakes. Shadows of gar were sliding in at every level, but they were very selective shadows. Allowing for perspective and distance, all those gar were the same size. All the nine pound gar for about a mile around had quickly arrived. Out of perhaps three thousand of them, Honeybucket selected three and lifted them out of the water. Of these, he further selected just one, for its fine color and proportion, and he threw the other two back. He put the one superb alligator gar into the

eviscerator. He adjusted dials, and the perhaps three thousand other alligator gar scooted out of there.

Honeybucket let the boiling water set for ten seconds. One does not mix fish-ways too closely. Then he set the dials anew. There was quickly a new turmoil and arriving, of a different speed and movement, of differently shaped shadows, of different foaming and wake. There was another large and rapid assembly, and it was made up of fourteen pound Blooper Fish. Honeybucket selected the best of them, and he dismissed the others. He put this finest Blooper Fish into the eviscerator, and at the same time he took out three pounds of tender flank meat of the Gar. He put the Gar in a high frequency oven.

"For salad, I'll have globigerina glace," Duffey said. "For fruit you might make me a chlamydomonas with kelp syrup. I'll have pond scum bread, and sea lice soup. And a Hashed-Ectocarpus Collins for cocktail."

"I'll have a desmid salad with ulothrix," said Biloxi Brannagan. "For fruit you might fix me a volvox colonial. Spirogyra bread, I suppose, and hydrodictyon soup. And a Foraminifera Julip for drink."

Honeybucket made the drinks first. Volvox and ectocarpus can be brought to congregate in waters by frequencies in the same part of the scale. They can, in fact, be brought in by common carrier and then unscrambled. And alcohol is one of the things (sugar and petroleum are others) that could be gathered as rapidly as might be wished from any water. Honeybucket had the drinks quickly, and he had the dinner ready in not much longer time.

"We have it all here," Leonard Archive told those travelers Duffey and Brannagan. "We've got it made. We could vegetate here now, except that we don't even let the vegetables vegetate. We insist that the vegetables supply us with electrical power. We have plenty of it from the sun, of course, and from the water flow, and from the wind. But a canny man will always have at least four strings to his bow.

The breathing of the plants exhibits a voltage differential, as does the polarity between the brown and the green plants. We draw on the bountiful sea, and on the bountiful blending of the sea and land here. Fishermen have always known that a couple of electrodes in the water and a little voltage applied to them will attract fish. We found that by using a variety of voltages and a variety of frequencies, and sometimes many pairs of electrodes, we could attract every sort and sub-sort of fish or crustacea or animals or plants or chemicals or minerals or salts or alcohols or petroleums or sugars. We found that there were minute quantities of *everything* in saltwater and in brackish water and in fresh water. And we found out that these minute quantities of *everything* will count up, in a very little while, to mountainous quantities. We learned selective polarization of every medium. We learned that wherever there are differences of potential there is power a-plenty, and that there are differences of potential everywhere. We learned a lot of things because we were too lazy to work for a living. And we have given all these techniques to the world."

"How about Puff Fish?" Melchisedech Duffey asked.

"It's a moral problem, of course, and a problem of individual vileness," Oliver Greenflag said. "If people want Puff Fish, who are we to prevent? I do not believe there is any way of blocking them anyhow. Now that the principles of frequency modulation and of frequency braiding also are understood, Puff Fish can be attracted in unlimited quantities just as anything can be. Puff Fish bait is a frequency. Frequency itself would have to be tampered with to make Puff Fish unavailable again."

"Let us talk about something less depraved than eating Puff Fish though," Leonard Archive said. "We can attract *everything* by frequency modulation and broadcasting, you know, feelings of pleasure and of displeasure, weather of every sort, notions of every sort, ideas, emotions, even people. We can attract any sort of people, of any age or

station. They come readily to the particular frequencies that they cannot resist. Honeybucket, surprise us with a visit of interesting people."

"All right," Honeybucket said, and he began to do things with dials and to set the special frequencies into effect.

"Gentlemen, there is *always* a sufficiency of everything near at hand," Greenflag said. "The problem has always been in finding the dippers to dip the different things up. The frequency signals are such dippers. They will dip anything out of water or land or sky. What kind of folks are you bringing to visit us, Honeybucket?"

"Twenty-one year old girls," Honeybucket Kincaid said. "I've always liked them at about that age. Ah, another thousand cycles here, and a few more pairs of electrodes there. Young people come to high frequency signals more readily than old people do."

Three twenty-one year old girls were seen coming down a waterway in a rowboat. It had taken only two and a half minutes from the frequency activation until their appearances. They paddled to the dock, and they tied up the rowboat there.

"I never saw such a tide as is running along here," said one of the girls who was named Janeway Celeste Lynne. "It just seemed to catch up our boat and propel it right along."

"But the ocean tide is pulling in the other direction, through all the salt water meadows now," Melchisedech Duffey pointed out. "You came here *against* a strong tide. It was the frequency modulation that caught you up and propelled you right along. Ah, that was a fine demonstration that you gave, Honeybucket."

"I'm Janeway," said Janeway. "These are my cousins, Candy Sue Pirogue and Etta Mae Mansion."

"Would you young ladies want anything," Leonard Archive asked, "outside of the pleasure of our company?"

"Puff Fish," said Candy Sue. "We hate them, but we love them even more, and we never know how to catch them."

OOooo, they are so dreamy and vile! Can you bring them in here with your frequency modulation?"

"Nothing easier," said Honeybucket. "If you can conquer your disgust..."

"Oh, we can, we can!" Etta Mae cried. "All the people are conquering their disgust now and eating all the Puff Fish they can get. Puff Fish are in. If only there were a way to get enough of them..."

"There is a way," said Honeybucket, and he began to adjust the dials. But Melchisedech Duffey went head-first into the Main Frequency Modulator (as the first one in the world, it was tied in with all the other frequency modulators and would affect them all); and Biloxi Brannagan was preventing anyone else from interfering with Duffey, by use of a hasty swivel gun. He came by the swivel gun by rubbing his hands together. He didn't know much about frequency modulation, but he knew about other things.

Then there was a bit of high frequency lightning in that Main Frequency Modulator, and there was a slight stench. Melchisedech Duffey came out of that modulator with all of his clothes burned off, and all the hair of his head and body burned off also. But he was smiling happily. "Got it," he said. "Got it. That is one frequency that will never frequency again. There will be no more Puff F — ah, there will be no more of what they want, not ever again. The bait bucket for them is destroyed, and there'll be no baiting them in again."

"Oh, we could repair the frequency modulators," Honeybucket said.

"It isn't broken," Melchisedech said. "Can you repair something that is working perfectly?"

"If it is working perfectly, then what is to prevent me imposing on it the frequency of... I forget just what frequency I am thinking about at the moment, but what is to prevent my imposing it again?"

"There is no longer any such frequency," Melchisedech said. "And there wasn't any such frequency before this

either. When we do away with a thing, we do away with it in past, present and future."

"There *is* a frequency to attract everything whatsoever," Honeybucket insisted, "and the different frequencies are easily found. I have only to activate the searcher device to locate the abominable... I forget just what the name of the abominable thing is it the moment... to obtain the corresponding frequency and to impose that frequency."

"The abominable thing doesn't exist any longer," Duffey said, "and it never existed before either. And there isn't any frequency to correspond to something that doesn't exist."

"You mean that we can no longer eat those vile — I forget their names?" Candy Sue demanded. "They sure were terrible, but if everybody wanted th —"

"Those terrible things do not exist," Melchisedech said, "and everybody is *not* eating those foul non-name things, nor will they ever. Come along, Biloxi. What's the next work order we have?"

So Duffey and Brannagan traveled into the future and rooted out many abominable things to the point where they did not and had not ever existed. And thus the people were thwarted in perversion after perversion. It was no hardship really. They already had plenty of perversions.

No more would there ever be swamp stories about— whatever its name hadn't been. Such beneficent extirpations every day count up. Ten thousand such adventures they had, and mostly it is only those that failed or partly failed that are remembered. For when a future evil is rooted out and completely removed, then there is nothing of it that can be remembered in any tense. But if any motlet of it is left, then it grows (though weakened) in both directions and sometimes it will be remembered a little bit as a grotesqueness. The great triumphs of the Argonauts, by their very nature, must be unknown. Bless all such work and adventure of the Holy Argo and her crew!

The *Argo* was, beyond everything else, a Quest Ship. There was much emphasis in the Ship's Logs on the quest and finding of the Golden Fleece of Colchis, and indeed this was one of the brightest of the early triumphs of the ship. But there were several more important findings than that of the Fleece, and dozens that were equally important. The *Argo* and the *Argo* Masters had recovered the Holy Cross exactly one hundred years after Saladin had rode away into the desert dragging it at his horse's tail. There was the recovery of the Lord's Table which had been in the Cenaculum in Jerusalem, and was now in the Bread and Wine Room on the *Argo*. There was the recovery of the Sancgreal, the Holy Grail that had been stolen from Glastonbury. There were the findings of the Holy Shroud of Turin, the Ring of the Nebelungs, the Philosopher's Stone. Ah, the discoveries, the discoveries!

There was the finding of the tomb of St. Jude, the Northwest Passage (it is still serviceable with a good nineteen foot deep channel), of Roland's Horn, of Alaric's Sword, of Aaron's Rod, of the Seamless Garment of Christ, of the Baptist's Head (it is still in good flesh, and the growing hair and beard have not been cut; they are each now more than one hundred feet long), the Sword and Scabbard of Saint Sécaire, the Magic Flute, the Great Mogul Diamond, the Iron Crown of Charlemagne, the Lost Dutchman Mine. And many others, some of them too holy to mention.

The latest and most contrary of the findings was that of the Sword and Scabbard of Saint Sécaire. And this is the exceptional one of the prizes, for it was not found by the *Argo* Masters, and they didn't want it to be found. They

wanted it to be lost and to remain lost. It was the anti-prize, a peril to the world.

In times past, the Argo Masters had lost the Sword and Scabbard three times. At its last losing, they had filled the space between the sword and the scabbard with iron, lead, brimstone, and babbet metal, all boiling hot, and this had welded the sword to the scabbard as the filler solidified and made it impossible for anyone to draw the sword out easily or accidentally.

Then they lost it in a place in the ocean named 'Nine Mile Depth'. In the floor of the depth, they had lost it a hundred meters deep in mud and lime ooze; and they had memorialized the ocean and its creatures around and about that the sword and scabbard must stay lost. And so it did stay lost for four hundred years.

Then some Frenchmen, the brothers Cyril and Cyrus Dimbeau, went down into the 'Nine Mile Depth' in a bathysphere. They took core specimens for a hundred meters deep in that sea floor then, and they struck something harder than mud and lime ooze. So they brought it into their bathysphere with grapples, and then they brought it up to the surface of the ocean and set it on the platform of their attending boat. It was the sword and scabbard of Saint Sécaire. This was on the early morning when Duffey and Brannagan had taken to sea together on journey as Argo Masters. And of course the Argo Masters came to that mid-Pacific place immediately. They scotched their *Argo* immediately along side, and they boiled onto the platform of the attending boat.

"What two extinct sea creatures are these?" Cyril Dimbeau asked. "Sure, I think they are already rotting as they stand there, they are so old and extinct. We'll just have all the blood out of them they have and pump them full of preservatives. They'll do to show for novelties when we get home with them."

"Do not on any account draw that sword from that scabbard," Melchisedech Duffey said.

"And what happens if we do?" Cyrus Dimbeau asked.

"If you draw it but an inch, two thirds of the people in the world will fall into a deep sleep. And they will die of it if they are not rescued quickly. The only means of saving them is to put the sword back full into the scabbard."

"Fair enough," said Cyril Dimbeau. "We'll make try of the affair." There was one other scientist there with the two brothers, and there were ten strong workmen and laboratory assistants there. These ten strong assistants grabbed Duffey and Brannagan and put them under tight restraint. And the three scientists were melting the flux out from between the sword and its sheath.

"It will move now" , Cyrus Dimbeau said. "I believe that it will move just about an inch." And the man drew the sword one inch out of its scabbard. The ten assistants fell down in deep sleep and rolled around on the platform.

"You were right. It worked," Cyril Dimbeau said. "The ten assistants have fallen into deep sleep. And the other five of us, we three scientists and you two sea spooks, are still awake. That is two thirds of us in this miniature world who are so stricken, and I assume that it applies to the maxi-world also. And if I pull the sword out the rest of the way?"

"The world will come to an end," Melchisedech said.

"Fair enough," said Cyril Dimbeau. "I always wanted to be there when the world ended, but I didn't know how to manage it. Pull the sword out, brother."

But when the ten assistants had fallen down in deep sleep, they had released Duffey and Brannagan from their tight grip by necessity. And while Duffey had been parleying with the scientists, Brannagan had retrieved the still-melted flux that had been poured out from between the sword and scabbard. Now he poured it back in, and it sized the sword and scabbard together again so that they would not separate easily.

"How clumsy of me," Brannagan said. "I stumbled with the bucket of flux, and I spilled it. Now you will have that little melting task to do all over again."

"Damned oafs!" Cyrus Dimbeau hissed. "Get back into the ocean whence you came."

"Let me have it," Duffey said. "I know a way to melt the flux out of it again in an instant. Then you can go ahead and pull the sword all the way out and destroy the world if you're so minded."

"Well, hurry it up," Cyril Dimbeau barked.

Duffey took the sword and scabbard, now tightly welded together again. But with an incredible clumsiness, he dropped the thing off the platform, and it went down, down, down, nine miles deep into the ocean, and then it began to bore its way one hundred meters deep into the mud and lime ooze to find its old place again.

"Oops, oops, oops, I dropped it! Fellows, I wouldn't have that happen for anything," Duffey apologized.

"Oafs, oafs, oafs," Cyrus Dimbeau cried. "Now we'll have to go all the way down again and get it."

"Get what?" Brannagan asked them. Brannagan had cannily spread the Forgetfulness Mesh over them and they couldn't remember the episode at all. The ten assistants, now rescued from their deep sleep, stood waiting orders, but no orders came.

"Well, it's been a pleasant visit," Cyril Dimbeau finally said. "Glad you couldn't stay longer."

Duffey and Brannagan sailed away and left the bathysphere people there, taking samples of ocean fleas at the middle depths. But they would not remember at all about the sword and the scabbard.

"We are going to have to find a way to lose that thing a little more securely," Duffey said. "In four hundred more years somebody is likely to stumble on it again."

It is always good to have a suspense-and-fun adventure early in the morning.

A bit later in the morning, at Gdansk on the Baltic, near the mouth of the Vistula, a stranger came to the *Argo*, he having the air of being no stranger at all. Now it was a plain case that any Argo Man should always recognize any other Argo Man anywhere, at any time. The only slight exception is that a man fallen from grace may not be completely recognized at once.

Well, neither Brannagan nor Duffey recognized this man immediately. They should have seen through every disguise, but it may be that they saw through one disguise too many to that basic 'Something a Little Bit Wrong'. The land they were in had been in the hands of the New Infidels for some years, and it may have been that caution was called for. It was really not caution that stood in the way here though. It was just fundamental failure to recognize.

"You bring the Brotherhood itself into danger if you fail to recognize me," this stranger said. "It is by this one thing only that the Brotherhood may be broken. Do not do it! Know me now!"

Well, this stranger was a mixture of disguises. He had a black hat on his head, and ear locks, like an old Jew. But he had a wide and treeless face like a Polish landscape, for the faces of Poles are always like the constantly changing and always lopsided map of Poland. But this man also had the blue eyes of Scandinavia, and the square hands of Holland.

"The Ship will know me," the man said. "The piece of talking oak in the ship's wheel will know me and speak." And the piece of talking oak in the Ship's wheel did speak, and it said "I know him" . But Duffey and Brannagan still looked at each other and at the man.

"We will all lay identifications out here," Duffey said. "We will see who are the men of the *Argo*." Duffey rubbed his hands together and produced a large gold coin with the King's Crown of Salem on one side and with the Bread and Wine on the other. It bore as superscript the magic name

'Melchisedech' and as subscript the words 'Thou Art Forever'. Melchisedech set the big coin on the steersman's sideboard there in the cabin. He had identified himself, though he had not been questioned. Biloxi Brannagan rubbed his hands together and produced an even larger coin made of the red-gold of Ireland. It had the Celtic Cross of Christ on one side of it, and a Coracle Boat on the other. It bore the holy name 'Naomh Brandon' on it. Brannagan set it there on the steersman's sideboard beside the Melchisedech coin. Brannagan had also identified himself, though this swift lion of the sea had not been questioned either.

The stranger then rubbed his own two hands together. This set off a shower of sparks from which was formed a large and living two-headed eagle, but no coin or medallion. The stranger had a lot of style in these things, however, and Duffey and Brannagan began to recognize him by this florid style. The man grinned and grimaced in a stagey manner. Yes, he was a real magician. All the real ones have this showiness about them. From his own mouth he took one thin half of a coin, and from one mouth of the two-headed eagle, he took another thin half of a coin. He put the two halves together, and there was a small clap of thunder. That was good show. On one side of the thus produced coin was the same two-headed eagle of Poland. On the other side of the coin was an ornate Crock or Pot or Night Charley. But there was no name on the coin yet.

The man then pulled the name 'Kasmir Gorshok' from the other mouth of the two-headed eagle, and he fastened it onto the coin. He set the coin beside the other two on the steersman's sideboard, and the other two did not reject it. This man was Kasmir Gorshok, the Casey of the Crock of the low middle ages, Casey Szymanski of Chicago, and Casey of the Zodiac. And he *was* a true Argo Master.

Kasmir waved the two-headed eagle to fly, and it flew away into the interior of the country. "That will bring their numbers up to nine," he said. The two-headed eagles of

Poland had been an endangered species for a long while, and whenever their numbers fell below nine, it was feared that their extermination was near.

So Melchisedech Duffey and Biloxi Brannagan sailed with this stranger-no-more, an old companion in magic and grace, on further adventures of the Fourteenth Voyage of the *Argo*. But it was very mysterious that they had not recognized him at once. How had he changed?

"But there is something gone wrong about things," Melchisedech said that same day as they wrangled around in shallow seas and treacherous estuaries. "There is a treason smell about Our Holy Ship. It's as if Judas himself were aboard."

"As you know, we transport Judas only one night every year," Casey explained to Melchisedech as to a child. "And then we carry him across one narrow strait only, and we are done with him in an hour. Then we use the herb Rosemary to remove the treason smell. So there can be none now. And this is not even that day or night of the year."

"There's a saying that one of the Masters of the Holy Argo Herself will turn traitor," Melchisedech said darkly.

"And the second part of that saying declares that it will be an affair between that Argo Master and God Himself," Kasmir said. "What is it to thee?"

At Karl Marx Stadt, near the upper waters of the Mulde, the Argo Masters destroyed a new incursion into logic that carried the tentative title 'I wake up forgetting'. Possible effects of this queer logic had been spilling out of the future into the various presents, and they were not good.

There was hardly enough water to float the *Argo* at Karl Marx Stadt, and there was scarce enough draught-way for that incursion into logic either. But the logic piece was baneful even as it attempted to launch itself off the sandbars and to float free.

Duffey and Brannagan and Gorshok burst in on a young man shivering in his underwear and sobbing with excitement as he scribbled furiously on little pieces of paper. The young man was named Ralph Rolfe and he was English on his father's side.

"Oh bother me not, ghosts, burglars, police spies, followers of static philosophy," Ralph sobbed as they came into his room this morning. "I *must* get it all down on paper before I forget it. Paper, paper, are there no more little pieces of you here? For the love of Logica Perversa herself, give me paper to write upon."

Casey Gorshok gave little pieces of paper to the young man, and he gathered them in from the young man again when they were full written with the wakening residue. And pretty soon, the young man ceased his frantic writing and half collapsed upon himself. Then Casey gathered in the last thing that the youngling had written.

"That isn't all. That isn't nearly all of it," the young man jittered, "but it is the vital keys to it. It is all gone out of my mind completely now, but there should be enough mind jogs and memory hooks down on the little pieces of paper for me to recreate the great and crooked system by. And this I will do when I am more clear in my mind. Have I pants somewhere? Do I not ordinarily wear pants? Have I coffee here? Do I not ordinarily drink coffee?"

Brannagan found the pants for the excited young man, and Duffey made coffee for him. By and by he was more composed.

"It is a completely new system of Perverse Logic that I have discovered," the young man said, "or that has discovered me and employed me as a medium. It will drive out all the other systems of logic as a shrew drives out mice. It has come to me in my sleep a dozen times, and I have always forgotten it as I awakened. I have known that if I could get certain key words and symbols down, I would be able to put it all together from them when I was in a clarified

wakened state. For a long time I have slept with a candle lit and with writing materials beside me to jot down the key words as I wakened, and for a long time something has gone wrong every morning. This morning, after I had received the great and crooked message once more, I was told in a sad voice, 'This is the last time that it will be given to you. Get it down this morning or lose it forever.' Well, I *would* get it down then, for there was not anything else that could have gone wrong with my precautions and procedures that had not previously gone and now been allowed for.

"I was mistaken in this supposition. There was one other thing that could go wrong, and it did. While I slept, mice came in and ate much of the writing paper that I had by my bedside, and they left only small pieces that they had bitten around. But I *had* to get the great system written down. I filled up even the smallest piece of paper that the mice had left. Oh, you do have them safely, sir, do you not? And you have them in the order that I wrote them?"

"I have them in the order that you wrote them, yes," Casey said.

"And they will be destroyed in the same order that you wrote them, in the same order that he has them," Melchisedech said. "Destroyed they must be."

"No, no, no!" the young man jittered. "I have the system in my mind no longer. I spilled all of the treacherous things down on the little pieces of paper. It is an entirely new thing. It will turn the world awry and set it by the ears."

"New and awry things usually do set the world by the ears," Melchisedech said. "But the world can hardly stand another entirely new and entirely harmful system of logic at this time. Believe me, we are not narrow-minded or arbitrary about this. It's a bad and slippery thing that you have almost introduced. It has come close to being born many times. Again and again and again it has come close. But now we are luckily rid of it this time also."

"Give me those little pieces of paper or I will shoot you all," the young man cried. "Have I a gun to shoot you with? Do I not usually have a gun here?"

Brannagan found the gun and gave it to the young man. Duffey found the bullets for it and gave them to him. The young man put the gun to the right temple of Casey Gorshok and fired it with a loud explosion. But Duffey and Brannagan and Casey had already retreated from there, out of that time and out of that place. Their exquisite sense of timing was the one thing that never left them.

The 'Sudden Withdrawal' was a device that they often used. They had carried out their mission and prevented a tricky thing from being born. It wasn't an ordinary tricky thing, or it wouldn't have been assigned to the *Argo*. There was something absolutely new in trickery and devilishness in it.

But, if their mission in this had been carried out perfectly and completely, the adventure could not even have been told about. The adventure would have been wiped out with the thing itself. And the adventure is told about. It is only the loose end adventures that have enough of them to be remembered and told.

"I shudder to think what might have happened if it had taken effect," Duffey speculated. "The last such thing that took effect put mankind into a twist for four hundred years, and this one could have been much twistier. Gorshok, just to add double surety to this matter, I did not hear the sound of the small pieces of paper being destroyed. Let us hear that sound now."

"Ah, I just thought that I might read a little bit of them now, Duff," Kasmir the sorcerer mumbled.

"No, no, destroy them at once," Brannagan insisted. "No one of even ourselves would be immune to their effects. You especially would not be immune. Destroy the little pieces of the logic system, Casey, and let there not be division between us."

Casey destroyed some little pieces of paper.

"Is that all of them, Casey?" Duffey insisted.

"All of them but three," Casey said. "Shoal water ahead! Watch the steering!"

"I see no shoal water ahead," Brannagan said. "Destroy them, Casey, all of them."

Casey destroyed three of them, but did he destroy all of them? Did he lie when he said that there were only three of them left?

"Do you not still have one of them, Casey?" Duffey asked. "Even one piece of paper will have evoking words or parts of words on it. From them, an evil person might be able to reconstruct the whole system. Destroy that last one!"

"I destroyed all three of them. Reefs ahead!" Casey bawled. "Shorten sail. Beat to the wind. Do various nautical things. All hands aloft. Awk, one last little piece of paper fluttered over the side undestroyed. I must have miscounted them. Oh well, no harm done."

"What if a devil-fish find it and save it?" Duffey asked. "Our mission is not perfect until that one piece is destroyed with the others. Do you not have a particular devil-fish who is mascot to you, Gorshok? You used to have one. Have I not noticed him following us in these very waters? What if he should..."

"I cannot hear you, Duffey, with this violent wind blowing," Casey said.

"There is no wind," Melchisedech spoke. "But here it is that we enter new waters. Destroy that paper when the devil-fish brings it to thee, Casey. I will not remember to remind you of this again. Sometimes the amnesia works for us and sometimes against us. Now the forgetting message works its forgetting on me also."

At Weinsburg on the Nechar River, the Argo Masters cured a young man of stuttering. This was a brilliant young man with a mind like a burning sphere and a will to move worlds. And

there was a red fury about everything that he did, and this caused him to be a great overturner. He had all excellent qualities and talents, and the stuttering had been the only defeating and frustrating ailing that he had.

The Argo Masters broke in on this brilliant man suddenly.

"How how how how d-d-did y-y-you g—" the young man began to question their intrusion.

"*Ephphatha*," said Melchisedech Duffey. "Be thou opened." The young man's lips and tongue were loosened, and he stuttered no more. The young man looked at them in that burnished way that all very brilliant people have, and he seemed a little bit disturbed.

"Had I asked to be cured?" he challenged them then.

"In a way you did ask to be cured of your stuttering," Melchisedech said. "You have complained angrily of your affliction to High Heaven. You have said that no man was ever so unfortunate as yourself. You have sworn that the clear river of your thoughts was roiled by the stuttering obstruction of your lips and tongue. You have sworn that you could move worlds, if only you were free of this misfortune."

"You did not pay attention to my question," the brilliant man said. "Of course I complained. This complaint was a part of my stock in trade. It was a means I used to work myself into a wrath. Of course I was furious against my affliction. It was a stepping stone to my being furious against other things. And how else could I have been furious so constantly and so easily? No, I did not ask to be cured. Afflict me again and restore me as I was."

"This I will not do," Melchisedech said. "I have said 'Be Thou Opened', and you are opened. One would have to be perverse to object to being cured."

"Of course I'm perverse," the man said. "That's the whole idea. I can move worlds whether I am bound or loosened, but I can move them in a crooked way only when I am bound. I want to be furious and frustrated! That is part of my mission. If I have not this goad of fury, I will be a cheerful man. And if

I am a cheerful man, the destruction that I have sworn to do will not seem important.”

“Be cheerful. Be opened. Stutter no more,” Melchisedech said. “And destroy no more. This turns you from an evil genius into a good genius, or at least a complacent genius. Out of here, companions, out of here.”

Duffey and Brannagan were out of there, out of that time and out of that town. They were already reading the work order for their next mission. And Casey Gorshok Szymansky, where was he? Oh, he would be along in a minute. Sometimes he loitered a bit as he dawdles over the curiosities of the world. Sometimes he seemed completely unable to keep his hands off of this thing or some other. But he would be along in a minute.

It was a good thing they had removed the stuttering impediment from the young man and unfrustrated him. Frustrated persons sometimes do very great harm, and the future must be cleansed of frustrations as much as possible. Likely enough, if some Argo Master gave him his stuttering back, he would be frustrated all over again, and his powerful mind would be slanted to evil and awry things.

But why should anyone give him his stuttering back again?

And why did Casey Gorshok the sorcerer lag so far behind the other two that day?

At Wien, on the Donau River, they had an encounter with an old problem of either ethics or philosophy. Whether it was better to do the right thing for the wrong reason, or to do the wrong thing for the right reason.

“There is a mixed group in this very city having a go at this very problem right now,” Melchisedech said, “and it behooves us to interfere. These people are in grave danger of following wrong reason in a particular action. What shall we do about this?”

"Trick them," said Brannagan, "or anyhow trick somebody. There is no thing like Holy Trickery for jobs of a certain sort. Great Thomas writes that this is the one case in which trickery is licit: that one may trick a tricker, or he may trick a tricker's tricker's tricker. You tick the odds and the evens off on your fingers when you are involved in such high speculation as this, and it is not difficult to keep things straight. We cannot have wrong committed for any reason."

"But we can," said Melchisedech. "We can have it committed for a right reason."

"But that would be wrong," Brannagan insisted. "I mean, it would not be right."

"Ah, but it would be," Melchisedech said. "It would be right for the wrong reasons, which would make it right."

"No, it'd be wrong," Brannagan still argued, "and rightly so. Why are we having trouble with a little schoolboy argument like this? Right and wrong are as differentiated as are beacons in the opposite ends of the sky. Who could possibly mistake them?"

"It's cloudy today," Casey said, "and the beacons don't shine as well as they might. There are some things that can better be solved by two heads than by three. If the first head is wrong, then the second head will contradict it and make it right. But the third head contradicts them; then it will make it all wrong again. Therefore, I will remove this my third head from the company for a little while."

Casey Gorshok strode off among the fountains and government buildings and pastry shops and left the other two to settle it. And Brannagan and Duffey joined the company of a philosophical activist group that was then in discussion. It was for the pleasure and the influencing of this group that they had come to Wien.

When Argonauts interfere in three or more futuristic affairs within a couple of hours, they may very well go a little wrong. Not very wrong, of course, for their being Argonauts will not allow them to go too far astray. There was

the further case that, in mixed company and in Wien, it was sometimes difficult to distinguish right from wrong, a difficulty that does not occur anywhere else in the world. Besides, it was a pleasant company, and a pleasant time of the afternoon.

This mixed group of people (you may not believe this about them) was of great influence on the world. What they thought here today would be thought tomorrow in the provincial capitals of Paris and Moscow and New York. And even Argonauts enjoy sharpening their wits on strange hone stones. But such arguments must come to an end when there are other adventures to have before sundown. And the mixed people were discussing more than one hundred variations of their original right-wrong argument.

Melchisedech Duffey slipped off and bought the café where the arguments were going on. Then he hired four fast-action carpenters with swift saws and unobtrusive ways. Each time a new variation of the argument was introduced, the four carpenters came swiftly and each of them cut one inch off the bottom of one of the table legs where the arguments were being held. They always did this so quickly and neatly that nobody noticed what was going on. "Now we are really getting to the gist of things," some of the arguers said. "Oh, this is the low-down of it. This is the low-down."

But, as the table got lower inch by inch, the arguers began to have third thoughts about the whole business. And when the table top was flat on the floor, Duffey and Brannagan, in their roles as magicians and certified Argonauts, moved in deftly and demolished the disputes.

"Your arguments haven't a leg to stand on," Duffey told one party of them.

"Your whole thesis lacks depth," Brannagan told the opposite party of them. "Your arguments have been reduced to the lowest common denominators. Leave them, and have peace in these things. Besides, your chairs are standing above you and calling you back to true reason."

So Duffey and Brannagan finally set the company right. Or they set it wrong. But they forced them to quit their silly quibbling, and they went away from there with the feeling of a job well done.

But someone else came and joined the company as soon as they left, someone else with an interest in continuing the confusion. And this someone else induced all that intelligent company to come to one of the other tables that was still intact, and to continue the nonsense there.

Who could that person have been?

At the Ship *Argo*, as usual, Duffey and Brannagan had to wait for Casey who had been taking his pleasure in the town. When Casey did join them, he had a new, sly look about him. Take that not to heart. Casey always had a new, sly look about him. But one Argonaut surely will not slip back and undo the work of two fellow Argonauts. He would not set things right if they had set them wrong, and he would not set them wrong if they had set them right. For, if an Argonaut did do wrong, he would always do it for the right reasons.

Unless, of course, he was Casey Gorshok Szymansky. And in his case—

At Milano, on the Po (or nearly so), they took Mr. X on board the *Argo*. This X was not a true Master of the *Argo*, however much he wished that he were. He was not one of the long-lived persons, and his present manifestation was likely to be the only one he would have. He was not a sorcerer, but he swore that he could reproduce any trick of any sorcerer if he saw it twice. He was acquainted with all three masters who were presently on the *Argo*. He was good and amusing company. There was no reason why he should not have ridden on the Ship. But easily tendered accommodations are not appreciated as much as those that are more hardly given.

"I do not know you, man," Kasmir Szymansky said when X came to them there.

"I do not know you, man," Melchisedech Duffey said. There was always fun to be had with X.

"I do not know you, man," Biloxi Brannagan said, "and our sublime destination can hardly be yours. Nor are you able to riddle our riddles."

"The Ship will know me," said X. "We have sailed together before. I am even a sort of half member of this corporation. Ask the talking oak that has a piece of itself in the Ship's wheel."

"I do not know you, man," said the piece of talking oak. "I believe that it is the nature of X to be unknown. Are you in Scripture, or are you in Inscription? Nobody comes onto the *Argo* who is not to be found in one place or the other."

"I am surely in Inscription," X maintained. "In the Attic ephebic inscriptions, X equals 'Xenoi'. No, I am not other wise in Scripture or in Inscription, but I ask you to take me into your company. All of you *do* know me.

" 'Xenoi' means 'Strangers'," the piece of talking oak said. And then it fell silent, for that was much more than it usually talked.

"Oh, I suppose that we halfway know you, X," Brannagan said, for he had a kind heart under his ruddy hide, "and you have always been good on the conversation and news. Set your golden medallion there on the steersman's sideboard and we will accept it as your identity."

X rubbed his hands together in the professional manner. He had seen real sorcerers do this trick more than twice, so he could do it also. And he did produce a big gold coin, according to first appearance. It had his coat of arms on it. It had half of all the fancy things that he wished to put on it.

"There it is," he said. "Was there ever such a medallion coin as that?"

"But, X, it is only a one-sided coin," Casey chided him. "That makes it a very one-sided identification. Are we not to

be allowed to hear the contra against you, the reverse of your own coin?"

X turned the coin over, and it disappeared. He had made the coin to be two-sided, but something had happened to it. He tried it again and again. He turned it and it was there, a good coin. He turned it over and it disappeared. There wasn't any reverse to it. X had crossed magic with real magicians. In particular he had crossed magic with Casey Gorshok the necromance and Gorshok had won. The coin is still there, on the steersman's sideboard in the cabin of the *Argo*. It's a curiosity the way it will appear and disappear when it's turned.

"Yes, X, you may sail with us," Melchisedech said. "But you sail as a servitor only and not as a Master Argonaut. You are talented, sure. And you are all over the place. But, with you, it is a question of not being able to see the water for the fish. You are to receive half shares of whatever booty we win. Many servitors receive only quarter shares."

"That is all right," X said, "and you *do* need me. Some of your latest exploits have been worse than just bad show. Gentlemen, they have been bush. Was there not something said about 'Reducing a problem to its lowest level'? Was there not a business of four quick carpenters and four quick saws?"

"You hear only about our busts and half busts," Melchisedech said. "The hundreds of consummate successes are closed off forever in that forgetfulness 'where the only sound is Lethe, and where the ovations sound now', as the poet says. Our really good work remains under the seal and the silence."

"That's what they all say."

So X sailed with them. And, really, they were glad to have him. At Our'yev, at the East Mouth of the River Ural in Tartary, Melchisedech Duffey lost his life. Oh, there was no question about it. He was killed dead: deader than a mackerel. Dead, and quickly stripped of the flesh off his

bones, and that flesh cremated to ashes. A man will not walk away from such a thing as that.

6

The Gold Ship or the King's Ship or the Shimmering Ship is an almost universal boys' dream. And all of the almost universal dreams have strong basis in fact. The almost universal dreams (but not ordinary dreams) are really sub-surface or simultaneous happenings which parallel the surface happenings and are often the stronger and more valid. Almost all boys realize that they have this valid dimension of other happenings and other life. But many of them, not being intelligent enough to keep up, forget it as they grow older.

The other world of oceans and ships and adventures is really there. It is the other side of the coin. It is often the clearest and most decorative side of that coin.

The *Argo* is not the only one of the preternatural Gold Ships or King's Ships or Shimmering Ships. There are a dozen or so of them. But the *Argo* is one of the most noble of them, and also it is one of those with the raciest adventures.

These Shimmering Ships, with their ever-young crewmen of very great age, have all the excitement and blood and thunder of Pirate Ships or Devil Ships, but they have the advantage of being on the side of light and glory.

But every boy reveling in their companionship by day and by night knows that their victories are not either easy or inevitable, that some of the greatest contests will be lost, that some of the great Ship Masters will be slain and skinned by their adversaries, that the adversaries are very strong.

These adversaries are people of stunning impact, of massive mystery, of overpowering personality, of

unmatchable courage. Give them all of that. So it is in the group understanding, and so it is in reality.

Among the most shattering of the Adversaries is that group known is The Evil Prince, the Purple Prince, the Mocking Prince, the Laughing Prince. The most powerful and trickiest of all these adversaries may well be the Laughing Prince of Tartary.

Except for a very short interlude in Wien, all the Argonauts had always been able to tell right from wrong very clearly, and they had always supported the right. They were Commando Experts of a sort, in a battle against evil things, and all of them served tours of duty at this heroic labor. They ransacked minds and seas and realms in their efforts, and they brought strength of character and lively imagination to bear.

The *Argo* did, very often, sail clear outside of the cosmos, and it did also sail on the insides of minds and persons and it learned of the dangerous reefs and promontories that are within. If the Argonauts ever became confused as to 'where' or 'on which side', there was an Instruction in the chart room of the *Argo* to set them right. Even when, several times, the *Argo* had been in evil hands and ownership, the chart room and its instruction were not disturbed.

There were, of course, gray areas that they traveled on their tours, but always they could be classified as good gray or bad gray, or they could be changed by astute battle from one to another. All of the worlds were sites of the long-drawn and never-finished battle between good and evil, and there was no one anywhere who could really stand aside from it.

Except the Laughing Prince of Tartary.

There had been bothersome reports of this Laughing Prince for the late while, that he was the Prince of the Third Way. He was not claimed by either God nor the Devil, and he claimed not either. He was neither hot nor cold, so he had been vomited out of the mouths.

“But he will rue the day when he vomited me out of his mouth,” the Laughing Prince had said, and he was not laughing when he said it. “He is the enemy of my enemy, but He is my enemy also. And the enemy vomited me out of his mouth also, and he likewise will rue the day. I am not so ‘neither-nor’ as all that. I am hot as fire and cold as ice, and they were wrong to eject me. I hold this third place, and I will not successfully be invaded here. My land is a scorcher when I want it to scorch, and mine is the only cooling spring in the country. Whoever comes to my land will have to come down to my spring to drink. My way is sweet and my burden light, and my spring is poisoned.”

It was reported that the Prince was really the vile creature out of the ‘dialectic pit’. It was also reported that he was not so no-sided as he pretended, that he really did adhere to one side, and that the truth was not in him. The Laughing Prince always wore large, black lens eyeglasses, and no one had ever seen his eyes. It was reported that he was a totally amoral person, which of course was impossible. It was reported that his laugh was really a bit of something else.

So the Ship *Argo* had a work order to check out the reports on this Laughing Prince. It was hardly known of what land he was the Prince. Tartary, like so many of the other realms, had been under the dominion of the New Infidels for several generations. Tartary was not even an official name any more.

The *Argo* went there by rapid but difficult voyage. Even getting a ship the size of the *Argo* onto an inland sea the size of the Caspian was tricky. The *Argo* Masters came to Tartary, and nobody there had ever heard of the Laughing Prince. They had, they said, no prince except the First Secretary of the Oblast. There were some slight indications of superimposed ambients in Tartary, but mostly the country was as it should be. So each of the Masters, and the Half-Master, searched as best they could.

Mr. X did the things he could do best. He talked to important people, or to people whom he fictionalized as being somehow important. He obtained from them bits and snippets of information that he thought might be important. He dug up strong hints of things as they should not be. If it hadn't been for the peculiar information that he uncovered, he wouldn't have been able to identify Duffey's ashes and bones later.

And Kasmir Gorshok, the Casey of the Zodiac and the Casey of Chicago, did the things he could do best. He sorcered up a pavilion that was like a pleasure palace. He sorcered aides into being. He gave lavish entertainments to such local officials who might be of value. He gathered all such intelligence as could be gathered by sorcery. He met the Laughing Prince in séances, and he was told by the prince that one of the coffins on the *Argo* would soon have its designated bones in it. There were always a few unoccupied (and some occupied) coffins on the *Argo* to take care of all eventualities. But Casey was not able to persuade the Laughing Prince to mend his evil or ambivalent ways, or even to admit that his ways were evil or ambivalent. "No, no, fuzz-face, my ways are beyond good and evil," the prince told Kasmir. Kasmir wasn't able to come to the Prince in the flesh. He was told that the story that the Prince had no eyes behind those black lens glasses was false. The mystery of the black lens glasses was something other than that.

Biloxi Brannagan did the things that he did best. He took the *Argo*, and he ransacked all the shores of that Sea to make them give up their answers. It was a mocking bunch of answers that they gave him, and yet not false. Brannagan was the finest seaman of all the fine seamen who had sailed on the *Argo*. There was nobody like him for ransacking a shore.

Melchisedech Duffey went upland a little bit into the boondock interior, but the interiors were never well done in treacherous Tartary. (Is Tartary ultimately the same as

Tartarus?) There was an emptiness and incompleteness about the interiors. It was for this reason that they were so susceptible to having other ambients superimposed on them. Upcountry, the superimposed ambients were much more noticeable than on the coast, and things were somewhat more strongly 'as they should not be'.

The Industrial-Agricultural country had a desert superimposed upon it sometimes, a desert that in reality had been driven away by the big dams and deep wells long ago. Melchisedech knew something about Asian deserts from his earlier eras, and he recognized that there were many things in this desert that did not fit. There were many skeletons of people lying around on the rocks and sand, but few of animals. There were conspicuous skulls of them here and there, but not skeletons. "And skeletons are harder to do," said Duffey, "unless you've studied them a bit." The rocks were not right and the plants were not. Even the blasting heat of the desert was wrong. It tore at one like the wind from a furnace, but it did not stir the plants or the sand. There was intense thirst in that desert, and rather stylized hallucinations. And yet, it seemed a skimpy net in which to allow yourself to be entangled.

Melchisedech was several times able to break out of this desert framework and back into the basic world. Now he entered a middle-sized town that was full of trucks and bustle. He ate a good meal at a restaurant 'Rose Ivanova's Kofeinik, You Know It's the Best, All the Truck Drivers Stop Here', of hearty food. And he drank eleven grasses of water. That's right, eleven glasses. His subliminal thirst, induced by the desert scenes, was very great. But ordinary water might not slake it.

Nobody in that place had ever heard of the Laughing Prince who was the enemy of both God and the Devil, and who was partisan of neither good nor evil, having a third thing going. "Such towering amorality must have left its mark somewhere," Melchisedech said. "There is one place in

every town where they will know *something* about every phenomenon, even if they have it all wrong.

Melchisedech went out of the restaurant and started for the newspaper building two blocks up the street where he would—

—but he was back in the desert again, and the town was gone. The middle-sized town, with its bustle and business, had turned into desert dust that hung faintly in the air, but the desert burning through it was much stronger. Melchisedech was tortured once more by the instant thirst. There were shocking hallucinations of the Laughing Prince. There were—no, these things could not be—hallucinations of hallucinations out of one of Melchisedech's childhoods. There were the three crooked persons with the slanted faces. They had pursued Duffey in his boyhood and tried to kill him. Later they had become cartoon characters and stereotypes and comic book persons. They were the SFM, the Slant Faced Men, of the Fantasy Rags. But now they were in the desert scene as bully boys for the Laughing Prince.

“You have to come down to my spring to drink,” the Prince was saying like an old record on a record player. And Duffey knew that he must indeed drink of that spring even if it should be the death of him. Duffey knew that in reality he had drunk eleven glasses of water in the last half hour. But he also knew that in unreality he was dying of thirst and would have to drink at a spring that he had heard gurgling on the edge of the town. He rushed to it. He found it. It was upwelling in sparkling splendor.

“Don't drink! It's poisoned!” millions of boys were trying to warn him out of their deep participation in the events. “It's poison! It's poison!” Melchisedech had always been in close rapport with the millions of boys. But now, though he heard them and their warning voices, he could not understand their words.

He drank of the poisoned spring of the Laughing Prince. And he was slain and seduced and defeated just as easy as

that.

He could see everything with great clarity after he had drunk from the poisoned spring, but it was all wrong stuff that he saw so clearly. The unreality had defeated him. This unreality is the greatest of enemies.

The spring was a gusher that was in defiance of all hydraulic laws. Duffy had drunk greedily from it, and then he had known that it was all over with him. He waited to die. The haughty prince was there to relish his death scene, but he seemed to be watching it not directly, but through some medium at second hand. The three slant faced killers slunk up. They were badly dated. They were caricatures. But now they were murder itself.

"They simply won't do, Prince," Duffey said. "They are American cartoon type, and they actually date before the year 1910. They grew up after that, year by year as I grew up, but they are still dated back in their beginnings. Those slant faces! Those knives! Really, Prince, you can do better than that."

"If you laugh at them, you laugh at me also," the Prince giggled furiously. Duffey knew then that the Prince had misnamed himself. He was the Giggling Prince and not the Laughing Prince. He could giggle as well when furious as when happy, and he was furious now.

"Their knives are thirsty," the Prince giggle angrily, "and I will let them have you now before the un-pain of death saves you from them. Suffer, Melchisedech, suffer!"

Melchisedech was paralyzed from the water of the poisoned spring, but his awareness of pain was still intact when the three slant-faced killers slithered in and began to murder him alive with their knives. It was a real death even though it was set in an unreal scene.

Melchisedech had that clarity and perception of special information that a dying body will sometimes feed back into whatever it is separating itself from. He knew now how the Prince could be so amoral. The Prince was very young, and

he was retarded in his intelligence. Not in his mentality, which was immense, but in his intelligence he was retarded. What surface glibness he had was from the televisions and the hallucinators that he watched. The mystery of the black lensed glasses, in fact, was that the two black lenses were the backs of two small television sets set close to the Princely eyes, and that these, and his own interior hallucinations, were all that the Prince could ever view. The Prince has a large but irrational brain, and great and unhinged psychic power. It was out of this that the first case ever of massive total amorality had been compounded.

The three slant-faced killers cut all the flesh off of Duffey's bones, and that is what killed him, beating the poison to it. But his spirit still lingered with his remains, as that of a new dead person will often do. Besides, he had received no further instructions. The slant faces had done their work and they went away, one of them eating the liver of Melchisedech, one of them eating the tongue, one of them eating the kidneys. They were followed by three slack-faced men (in archetypal literature, they are sometimes confused with the three slant faces who go before them, but the Prince did not confuse them; he kept a trio of each) who built a furnace fire. The slack faces burned all the sinew and viscera and flesh of Melchisedech until they were nothing except hot ashes (they would always be hot and ready to burst into flames). They put these ashes, still smoking, into a cigar canister that had once belonged to the King of Spain.

The amoral desert and the amoral figures faded away. There was a slight jerk or jar then as when these things shift to a different context. The mortal remains of Melchisedech Duffey were in the middle of an unbusy street in Gur'yev, a town at the East Mouth of the Ural River in Tartary. The bones lay lankly there in the street, and the smoking ashes were in a little canister beside them. Both X and Kasmir Gorshok, gathering their information in their different ways, had coincided in their results. They came to the place in that

street where Melchisedech's death and remains had impinged into the world of Reality. And they were able, by methods that were themselves very near to sorcery, to identify Melchisedech positively in both bones and ashes.

A minor official who was there was glad enough to be rid of the whole business. "I just don't know how I would have written up a report like this," he said. "People keep arriving out of that 'nowhere desert', dead and disfigured and our superiors always believe that we have been drinking when we report such things. Take them and say no more about them, and I will not."

"I will be the custodian of the ashes," X said. "I have a premonition that I will meet Melchisedech alive again, and then I will give them back to him. Few men have such keepsakes of themselves."

X kept the ashes in their canister. X and Casey Gorshok carried the bones down to dockside, keeping to the side streets from some kind of embarrassment. And Biloxi Brannagan was just bringing the *Argo* back into port, knowing that the search for the Laughing Prince had ended in disaster.

They put the bones of Melchisedech Duffey into one of the caskets of the *Argo*. Brannagan, in his person of St. Brandon, said the 'Mass of the Holy Precursor Melchisedech' for him. (It was the Mass of April 31 when the old calendar prevailed.) And Brannagan and Gorshok and X half-believed that they had done all that they could do for Melchisedech.

And Melchisedech lay in that coffin, and he lay there and lay there.

"I thought there would be more to it than this," Melchisedech said.

The *Argo* Masters, Brannagan and Casey Gorshok, and the Half-Master X, went on to further adventures and rectifications, but it just wasn't the same thing without Duffey booming in the midst of them. The bones of their

companion Melchisedech, just lying there, spooked them and gave an incomplete air to all their doings.

And so it went, for about three days. Then God Himself came onto the *Argo* in the uncounted hour.

"Have you been relieved of your duties as a Master of the *Argo*?" God asked those bones, and they leapt with joy at the sound of His voice.

"No, I have not," the bones of Melchisedech spoke boldly, "but I am dead and stripped of my flesh. I waited here in my coffin where I knew You would find me. I did not have any further instructions. I did not know whether I was wanted as Pilot and Master any longer."

"The articles of the voyage do not require that you be a *fleshed* Pilot and Master," God said. "And you are always wanted. You, and you others, see to the details among you."

Well, it would be awkward, but it could be done. There would be a sort of joyful awkwardness in finding ways to go about it. Melchisedech still had all his faculties, his movements, his merriments. His old seaman's clothes still fit him, though a little bit scarecrowishly. Casey Gorshok made for Melchisedech a golden mask to go over his bony skull, a golden scarf to go around his neck, and golden gauntlets for his hands and wrists. These golden fabrics came from combings of the Great Golden Fleece of Colchis itself.

Melchisedech could have made these things himself, but Casey wanted to make them for him as a sign of their friendship, which was indeed in need of repair. Melchisedech could no longer speak properly, because of his fleshless throat condition. But he could communicate, and one did not always notice that his communication was not speech of the ordinary sort.

And so it was that, with the bones of a merry dead man at the helm, the *Argo* sailed on some of her highest adventures. She became the talk of the seas.

But it wasn't as easy as you might suppose. The golden mask didn't have the eye slits quite in the right place. Melchisedech no longer had eyes, but he still had something there, and the mask often impaired his sensing. And those golden gauntlets on his hands and wrists, sometimes it seemed as though they coarsened the steersman's fine touch on the wheel. Even the gold scarf around the throat may have choked down a few noble impulses. But, if it were all made out of the Fleece Itself, and shaped by an Argo Master, where could the fault lie?

7

After this very real death, Melchisedech Duffey could still come and go in time and in space, but he could go on living only a very few years into the futures: and some of the incursions of the *Argo* were beyond those few years. As a stubbornly dead and resolutely bony man, he accomplished things that another man could hardly do. There was an ambivalence about him (he said that he had a tibia in each of the worlds), but there was an awkwardness and unaccountability also. The future is wraithy in any case, and one may excuse a certain wraithiness there. But as to present time, however constrained that present scene might be, what was the case of Melchisedech in it?

If an Argo adventure was more nearly in the present time, if it impinged less far into the future than did the Adventure of the Laughing Prince, then Melchisedech became as a normal man again, with flesh on his bones, and a voice back in his voice box. In that case, he used the same bones that he had been using, and he used the same flesh that he used to use. But were not the ashes in the canister a residue of that old flesh? The ashes did not disappear at such times, though they smoked uncommonly and seemed a bit more hot. But Melchisedech walked in his flesh, and his flesh was

at the same time ashes in the can. This was the Ambiguity of the Flesh of Melchisedech Duffey, the 'Ambiguity of the Flesh' that would be with him for many many years, all through his married life, all through the New Orleans days and nights, all through his less spectral adventures. But his flesh would be no less valid from suffering this ambiguity.

Henceforth (and preforth) Melchisedech always had the feeling that the 'Present Time' was really a sort of living in the 'Past'. Melchisedech had been quite a young man when he first (and last, and always) set his person onto that circumstance named 'The Sea of the Seven Lost Years', the sea and years in which all of the *Argo* adventures were enacted. And that not always contingent sea could be re-entered at any of its shores. It could be entered from a shore where Melchisedech was nineteen or sixty-nine years old, from a shore where he was twenty-four or eighty-four years old, but he would always be a young man again when he had stepped from the shore.

"And I must remind you that you can leave the *Argo* again at any of the shores, at that of age twenty-four or at that of eighty-four," X told Duffey. "And if you leave it at the shore of an early age, then you leave it before your death and confusion, and you will have your long life ahead of you yet."

"What are you saying, X?" Melchisedech asked him. "Your mouth moves but I cannot understand your words. "Leave the *Argo*? Why should I want to leave the *Argo*?" Melchisedech asked.

Duffey, however, seemed (to himself, and even to those who knew him best) a not quite-real person on his every return to 'present' It seemed to Duffey himself that whole hunks of his life, living them for the first and only time as he was, were being lived in the past.

The Chicago years, from this unmoored viewpoint, would have a strong tone of living in the past to them. By that, Melchisedech never knew his wife Letitia except by

incursions into the past, since the earliest shore of the Seven Lost Years went back before he had known her. The New Orleans years were always a sort of living in the past too. There was nothing wrong with this. It gave depth to those time and experiences. But Duffey really would be a bundle of anomalies in the decades when he would run the Walk-In Art Bijou in New Orleans, when he would keep his own ashes in a cigar canister on the table there, when he would parade such incredible knowledge, and sometimes such incredible ignorance and simplicity. The unreality of Duffey would be to everybody the most striking thing about him. It wasn't that he was destined to die in the near future. Everybody does that. It was that he had already died in the near future. And it wasn't so much that he made untimely forays into the future beyond the point of his own death. "For all the lives he has lived, he hasn't died nearly enough deaths," Absalom Stein would say of Melchisedech. And that would tell a lot about him.

Duffey's relationship to Stein, and to others of the 'Animated Marvels' was a mixed up business. Duffey really did 'create', to some extent and in some aspects, that bunch of animated marvels. And yet most of the Marvels were themselves Masters of the *Argo*, and were probably as old as Melchisedech, within a few centuries. They all belonged to one living corporation. The Argo Masters were an interdependent society, and each member played some very special role in every other one of them. But what role, for instance, did Kasmir-Casimir-Casey play to all the others? What role did Count Finnegan play? Or Stein? Or Teresa Stranahan (probably hers was an animating role just as Melchisedech's was a creative role; they are not quite the same). What role did Biloxi Brannagan play? Or Henry Salvatore? There aren't a large number of absolutely vital roles, or there would have been a large number of Argonauts to play them to the others. And there weren't.

But whenever the *Argo* would come to land to refit or to take on water or provisions or sea stores, she was likely to come to one of those chancey places or times in a present day context. And her few hours or days in such a port could be years or decades according to the flowing and present time. And some of the sea stores and ship stores that the *Argo* took on were, though absolutely necessary, intangible.

The *Argo* took on electric life from Teresa Stranahan and Margaret Stone and Henry Salvatore in their world militant or 'present' lives. She took on sea biscuit from Hans and Marie Schultz, and Jew bread from Absalom Stein, and Purgatorial Loaf from Bascom Bagby. She took on sea stores from Marie Monahan also, and from Finnegan. She took on ship's timbers and even masts from Zabotski.

There was a ships' chandler in New Orleans who had nether millstones that were harder than any others. There was a boats' supplier in St. Louis who had boat hitches so that no barge or tow need ever be lost from a hitch. Those things are important.

The *Argo* had always to come back to its sea wrack roots, or to its land roots in a 'present time'. There was sound sustenance in the 'present times', but in the 'futures' the sustenance was often food too small, or too large, or too strange. It was of those weirdly verdant futures that Blessed Austin, an old *Argo* Master he, wrote, "And these were the dishes wherein to me, hunger starven for thee, they served the sun and moon" . Don't knock it who have never been served the sun and the moon in a dish, but both these are weak candles before the Source itself.

It was of a future that had to be forced to disgorge a past and a present that Blessed Ezekiel spoke "Oh my people, I will open your graves and have you rise from them, and I will bring you back to your land." Ezekiel was a very early *Argo* Master.

It was of a present, ever-cutting into the future, that Blessed Margaret Stone spoke, "I can procure it that no one I

have ever known will be lost. I have this as a promise, and no one else in the world has been given this same promise. But what of those whom I have never known? What promise will save some of them?"

"Margaret, Margaret," Melchisedech would say when he would hear her expound this, "You went to see and to heckle the Devil himself when he once spoke in this city. And later you drank coffee with him and talked with him privately. So you do know him. Is he then covered by the promise to you that he will not be lost?"

"He is covered by the promise, and he will not be lost," Margaret said. "Even now, he may already have broken with that thing. But he is a devil only. He is not the Great Devil Himself. Him I have not known."

"Yes, he was the Great Devil Himself," Melchisedech would say at that time, "or that is the prevailing opinion."

"Listen, you masters of the several worlds, how do you know that *your* salt hasn't lost its savor," Margaret would challenge them. "How are you sure?"

"You and yours make me sure," Melchisedech would say. "If our salt has lost its savor, well then we will get more savor from some of you here. See to the stowing of a few hundred weights of savory salt, favorite urchin. We sail again within the year, and we will fly a new pennant 'This Ship is Salted by Blessed Margaret Herself.'"

Duffey had once said "Every attempt to get the people to change the present to improve the future has been a dismal failure." But Duffey had been wrong. People like Henry Salvatore and Margaret Stone and Teresa Stranahan and Mary Virginia Schaeffer, and even Absalom Stein, and even quorted Zabotski, would be changing the present to improve the future. They would be doing it massively.

Margaret would always be "The Fire that sayeth not 'It is enough'." The shape of the world would have been different, and more ungainly without her. They were a bunch.

From the earliest sail ship days, there have been good islands, recuperative islands, where ships might be watered, provisioned, stored, every one careened and overhauled. Such an island would have to be a copious and accessible place with a fine flow of fresh water, good game for hunting, or good cattle or giant turtles for meat supply, fruit or coconut, pleasant climate for recovering from sickness, sea stores, turpentine, tar, jute fiber, cloth or vegetable matting that could be used for cloth, timbers. And native workmen and native friendships were advantages also.

The *Argo* had quite a few such islands, whether they were completely surrounded by water or not. The Land of the Animated Marvels was such a recuperative island for the Ship. This was also called 'The Archipelago' or 'The Greater Archipelago'. This was a scattered island with its population in various places, but mostly in Chicago and St. Louis and New Orleans. It had old liaison with the *Argo*. Many of its members were themselves Argo Masters though they might not always remember having followed that trade, until some of them were called back to it. They offered sweet water and provisions and healings and virtues. But the interrelationship of the Argo to this Island or Archipelago of Animation, in terms of time and place, is not at all well worked out. It is supposed that it is all down in the log books of the *Argo*, but these lack indexing and correlation.

Melchisedech Duffey sometimes sailed a hundred different adventures on the *Argo* in the interval of no more than a single day that he was absent from his establishment in Chicago or his Walk-In Art Bijou in New Orleans. And Biloxi Brannagan lived ashore for thirty years with his wife Gertrude in Biloxi, Mississippi, not turning a lick, and this thirty years was all during a quite short leave of absence from the *Argo*.

The *Argo* people cruised various presents and futures. But

could one always tell when he was in a future?

An Argo Master could almost always tell, by the wavy billowy glints and sharps of light and shadow, like sunlight under water.

But others than Argo Masters cannot always tell, in as much as it might be present and not future time for those others when it is future for the Argo Masters.

8

There were events and rumors of events, but the end was not yet, not quite yet.

The effigies had always been on the *Argo*, for this voyage and for every one of them. Each person who came onto the *Argo* as Master donned his effigy, which then became part of him, and he wore it. And this released another Master to go and leave his effigy behind. A Master and his effigy did not seem to be present separately at the same time. The effigies were of no real importance, except that they were good working seamen.

But each Argonaut, coming onto the *Argo* for another tour as Master, would do creative things to all the effigies of absent Argonauts, for that is one of the ways that personalities are built up. But now, standing against this, there were destructive rather than creative things done to three of the effigies. These three effigies were violated and marred by none other than Casey Gorshok. This was after he had been on the *Argo* for some time, and it was done in a fit of pique. One of the effigies that he violated was that of an Argo Master, and the other two had been companions or companions to be of the Master. Yes, there were effigies of respected companions on board. There could be more effigies than there were Masters, just as there were more

coffins on board the *Argo* than were needed to contain the remains of all Masters everywhere.

The effigy of the Master was clearly that of Count Finnegan. Well, Count Finnegan was an accredited Astronaut, a High Master. His effigy could licitly be there, and it could have two companions if it wished. But who were the two companions?

All three of them had been smeared by a marring hatred, by a creative urge gone awry. It was Casey Gorshok's hatred, which was hard to understand. Gorshok was always a gentle and compassionate man.

One of the companion effigies looked like a Hercules Monkey, but it also looked like a man. The other one of them looked a little bit like a Mottled Skin Gilbert Hyena, an unkind appearance to give anyone.

Now a brief world history for the last two millennia:

There had been, since the time of Restored Salvation, one central institution in the world. This central institution of the world was now, in these latter years, being systematically destroyed. It was known that the world itself could not survive the destruction of its central institution.

"We know that," the systemic destroyers said. "We know how closely the world and the thing are linked together. Why do you think we're doing it? We want the world destroyed."

But the bells for the 'Last Rally' had been set to ringing by a few persons who opposed the destruction.

Conclusion of the brief world history of two millennia.

It was in the 'Third Year of the Bells' that Count Finnegan did come on board with two companions, all of them in such sort of disguises as any sharp-eyed mariner could see through. They slipped into and absorbed their marred effigies. The point about these three men, Count Finnegan Himself, and Gilberto Levine and O'Brien, and Herman Hercules, is that they were acting as doubles or stalking horses for three

Princes of the Ekklesia (that central institution on earth than which none can be higher). Or else they themselves were the three Princes disguised as their own doubles.

The assignment of Count Finnegan and his companions had been to get themselves killed in place of the three Princes, or at least draw the murder fire away from the Princes. And they had failed in their assignment. The three Princes had all been murdered. And these their three doubles still lived and traveled the lands and seas.

There was one music sound that became noticeable shortly after the coming on board of these three doubles. It may have been going on ever since their coming on board, but it only gradually rose to full audibility. This music sound was produced by certain Coryphaena Fish rising with their heads above the waves and blowing horns (shell horns, but with bright brass stops and frets), blowing them now loudly and clearly.

This always happened whenever a present or future Pope was riding on the *Argo*. It had happened a dozen times in the *Argo's* history, and it was a fact beyond question that this music of such unusual origin served as a continuing salute to the personage.

One other person had come onto the *Argo* at the same moment as Finnegan and Gilberto and Herman Hercules. This other person did not come onto the *Argo* openly. He came over the poop, and he hid, except from Melchisedech that is. No one could hide from Melchisedech when he was in his state of fleshlessness. The person who was acting so peculiar, not so peculiar for him though, was X.

But was not X already on the *Argo*? No, he had left the *Argo* openly three ports back, for service of another sort, as he said, and now he returned secretly. Secretly, but brightly, for now he was in red robes and red-piped cape. And he was Monsignor X.

He brought with him a sly-wrapped package. He always brought something such whenever he came. He showed it to Melchisedech in one of those unaccountable hours of the night. It was the oddly-marked, flayed skin of one Cardinal Artemis.

"Yes, this is the holy, flayed skin itself," Monsignor X told Melchisedech, "and it is marked in a very peculiar manner. And so is the skin of one of the men who now sleeping in a berth on the *Argo* here, one of the men who came on board with Count Finnegan. The Cardinal's flayed skin here, and the living skin of that sleeping man, have almost identical markings. This man was supposed to be double of the Cardinal, but how can we tell which is which for certain now?"

"Ah, flay the sleeping man, I suppose, X," Melchisedech said, "and run both the skins through our computer. That should tell us which is the false skin and which is the true, which is the double and which is the man. But only Count Finnegan and Gilberto the man know of the marks."

Duffey at first thought that a most peculiar fog was rising in the night. Then he saw that it was the special shimmering. That meant that the events happening now and henceforth, though of high probability, were not absolutely happening. It was really a sort of relief.

"But the flayed skin that I hold in my hands, to what man does it belong? The skin of the dead Cardinal Artemis was marked and mottled naturally. The skin of Gilberto who would play his double was marked by Gilberto himself with a tattoo needle, and it had all the marks of the Cardinal's skin. But Gilberto put on certain of his own characteristic marks also, 'So that I will know my own skin if I ever see it again,' as he said. But which skin is it now? Are there too many marks on it, or too few? Of which man is this the skin? And which man is sleeping on this ship right now?"

"I don't know, Monsignor X," said Melchisedech of the bones only.

“I find it significant that you, a certified sorcerer and magus, do not know such a simple thing,” Monsignor X said.

Yes, it was possible that Casey Gorshok Szymansky, of the Zodiac and of Chicago, was somewhat chilly to Count Finnegan and his companions when those three came onto the *Argo* during the ‘Third Year of the Bells’. But both of them were Argonauts and Masters, so a chilliness between them would not have been becoming. There had to be some explanation of the apparent frostiness of Casey, since it could not be real.

Then there was an event of great importance in the history of art. Count Finnegan, in that short time he was on the *Argo* at that time, painted thirteen really stunning pictures. This was the “Deaths of the Cardinals” series. They are beyond all price. They are also beyond almost all access, for they are painted on the very bulkheads of the ‘Bread and Wine Room’ of the *Argo*, and the *Argo* does not come to the call of random persons.

Could there be any doubt that Count Finnegan himself painted them? Cardinal Hedayat, that great Prince of the Church and look alike double of Finnegan, had been an accomplished amateur painter. But had he such power as this? Was there on all the Earth, now that Adam Scanlon was dead, any painter other than Finnegan who was capable of such work? This was consummate power in portraiture.

The series showed the thirteen executions or murders of the thirteen very great men. All of them were wonderful in their power and majesty, but the ‘Hanging of Cardinal Gabrailovitch’, the ‘Beheading of Cardinal Ti’, the ‘Flaying of Cardinal Artemis’, the ‘Impaling Upside Down of Cardinal Hedayat’, these were surpassing.

The thirteen great paintings, representing the Cardinals Ti, Brokebolt, Merry de Val, Leviathon, Artemis, Lloyd-Spencer, Salvatore, Gregorio, Runosake, Doki, Gabrailovitch,

Erculo, and Hedayat, showed thirteen very great men, some of them saints, one of them Salvatore an Argo Master.

"My God, what passion!" Biloxi Brannagan had cried out when he saw those beautiful and torturous burstings of color. These were life and death portrayed.

"Biloxi, you have known myself and you have known Melchisedech and others of us," Count Finnegan chided him, "and you still use words wrongly, as a land-bound mortal would. 'Passion' is but the weak opposite of 'Action' as to be passive is the opposite of to be active. You should look at these and strike your forehead with your hand and cry 'My God, what action!' Action does not require such incidentals as exterior motion. Action is..."

"Be off with thee, thou impelled genius, thou glorious counterfeit, thou delicious fraud," Biloxi Brannagan cried at him.

"We go to the 'Belling Shoals', to the 'Ringing Rocks', to the hewn cave in the heart of the 'Mooring Stone'," Count Finnegan said to them all. "Ours is a very short trip with you this time. And I may never again set foot on the *Argo* till I sail on her on the Four Waters of Paradise. We are going to the Haven in the Shoals because that is the last refuge on Earth for us. We are assembling there now, by various conveyance, thirteen shadow men, thirteen doubles of dead princes, because we will play a trick on the Judas World by going there. Of the thirteen of us, one of us will *not* be a shadow man. One of us will not be the double of a dead holy man. One of us will be, pardon me, a dead holy man who is still alive. And by that we will effect it that the line is not broken. We will assure it that the world will not be lost before the last battle begins at least. You will know that we have not let the line be broken by the fact that on your very next adventure you will have the transporting of the Antichrist. Were we extinguished now, his evil would already have been done and there would be no need for him to appear in the world in person. But our line will still be

unbroken when Armageddon Morning dawns red. One of us will be reigning when this very ship, the Holy Argo, carries Antichrist to the Plains of Megiddo."

"The Antichrist will never travel on the *Argo*," said Biloxi Brannagan.

"He has done so," said Gilberto Levine and O'Brien, the double of Holy Artemis.

"He is doing so," said Herman Hercules, the double of Holy Erculo.

"He will do so," said Count Finnegan the double of Holy Hedayat.

When Count Finnegan and his companions left the *Argo*, the Coryphaena Fish with their brass-fretted shell horns stayed by that shore of the 'Ringing Rocks' where the three landed, and they did not follow the *Argo* further.

9

Melchisedech Duffey and Biloxi Brannagan and Kasmir Gorshok, the three Masters then a-sail on the *Argo*, declared themselves in perpetual session to guard against the coming of the Antichrist onto the *Argo*.

"Prophecies are made for man and not man for prophecies," Melchisedech swore. "If a prophecy is bad hap for man, or if it signifies the end of man, then we will contravene it. Myself, I cannot even recall the prophecy that Antichrist will sail on the *Argo* to Megiddo."

"I believe that it is somehow combined with the Judas Prophecy," Casey said.

"And it is necessary that it should happen," said Biloxi Brannagan. "It is needful that this evil person of Mystery does go to Megiddo. Scripture tells us that this, along with other related things, must happen."

“ ‘It is necessary that it happens, but woe to him by whom it happens,’ is what God in Scripture says,” Melchisedech said. “My own prayer is ‘Let this misfortune happen if it must, only not yet!’ Let this woe, which will be eternal, not fall on us. Not on myself, not on thee Biloxi, not on thee Kasmir, not on Holy Argo Herself. Somewhere there are experts at detection and scrutiny who could set up conditions so that this ‘Person of Mystery’ could in no way come onto the *Argo*. Who are these experts? Where will we find them?”

Finnegan and his companions had left the Ship by then, and the *Argo* was on further adventures.

“Oh the highest experts will be found in their graves,” Kasmir said, “or we’ll find them still struggling in the World Militant, or we’ll find them still unborn. Or in fiction. Damn this flitting fog!”

“The flitting fog, the shimmering, is to be blessed and not damned,” Melchisedech said. “It means that some of the most direful things are not of absolute finality at this time, We will find the experts at once, wherever they are, and we will procure their services. See to it, Gorshok! See to it, Brannagan! See to it, myself!”

Well, they got such as they could of the experts in scrutiny and detection. Some of these were indeed fictitious, and they were routed out of their fictional graves. Some of them were authentic persons behind fictional disguises, and these were plucked either out of life or out of death. All the better ones insisted on anonymity before they would give advice: so these will appear under code names. So it happens that they will all be called by the names of famous detectives, whether these are their code names or their real names. They are here called Philo Vance, Father Brown, Doctor Thorndyke, Max Carrados, and Professor Augustus S.F.X. Van Dusen. And thus they advised how to keep a person from entering:

“Fireplaces are often the keys to situations like this,” Professor Augustus S.F.X. Van Dusen, also known as ‘The Thinking Machine’ said. “I always regretted that I could not use a fireplace in my famous ‘The Problem of Cell 13’, but fireplaces are so seldom found in standard jail cells. When one considers a room or a building or a ship, one says ‘This is still a cube, however much it is distorted. We still have the problem of entering or leaving a cube. And a cube is made up of four sides, distorted maybe, and a top and a bottom; or four bulkheads and an overhead and a deck if it is a ship. Something coming into this cube must come in through one of the sides, or through the top or the bottom’. Aha, yes, that is the classic statement. But now comes the classic exception that is so often forgotten: ‘Have you remembered the fireplace?’ More people have gone wrong by not remembering fireplaces than by any other thing. A fireplace is not really a wall, and it is not really a ceiling, but what is it? Are there any fireplaces on the *Argo*?”

“There are a few,” Kasmir Gorshok said. “I suspect that most of them are subjective or state of mind fireplaces. Every study, every den, every wardroom, on ship or off, has to have a fireplace. There is no satisfaction in such a place without one. But a fireplace need not have an exit to the outside world. A sorcerer in particular has to have a fireplace. He uses the shapes that appear in it for the assembly and selecting of his thoughts and figures. He will also use it as a Sorcerer's Furnace or as an Alchemist's Retort. He will use it for conjuring, or just because a sorcerer would be lost without a fire and a fireplace. There are a number of sorcerers affiliated with the *Argo*, so there are a number of fireplaces on her. But as I say, they need not have outlets to the exterior world. They may be subjective fireplaces, blind fireplaces.”

“Blind spirits may enter by blind fireplaces,” the Professor said, “and I believe that we are dealing with such here. And once they are inside, they can turn themselves into almost

anything. A fireplace is neither a wall nor a ceiling, but it is a forgotten entry place between the two. Do you sorcerers or masters have access to or command of any firedrakes?"

"Oh certainly," Kasmir said. "We can command all the firedrakes we wish, and they will come."

"Then set a firedrake to guard each fireplace," the Professor said. "Take ordinary precautions about all the other entrances. Make sure that he who would come aboard does not have an ally on ship already. Watch all these things, and the code-named 'Man of Mystery' will not be able to come onto the *Argo*."

"The thing to keep track of is who goes out and who comes in," said the person using the name of 'Max Carrados the Blind Detective'. "Do not trust anyone. If more persons come in than go out, then there are additions to the people here. Sound every alarm then, for you have an illegal entry. Break down the security into sections. Make it check for every person, even for yourself, most especially for yourself. And the person who has more entries than exits is himself the guilty one. If you yourself come in more times than you go out, then you may be the culprit, you may be the invader, you may be the 'Man of Mystery'. Watch particularly whether you do not sometimes use a disguise when you come in. Sawed-off shotguns, strategically placed, are a good solution to this problem. They will blast and kill anyone who has an entry that is not balanced by a previous exit."

"Always notice the frame of a picture or of a problem closely," said the person using the code name of Doctor Thorndyke. "Always distrust a person who says that an answer must be either inside or outside of the framework of a problem or a question. Perhaps the answer is neither inside nor outside the framework. Perhaps there are two different meanings to being 'inside' a frame. A thing may be in or inside a frame, and yet not be in the space *enclosed* by the

frame. Especially if the frame is made out of five-eighth inch hardwood moulding, the answer may be hidden within the frame itself. You will have to take the ship apart and examine it plank by plank and stick by stick and nail by nail. Examine them all minutely and individually. The ship is its own framework. You recall that in my 'The Case of Oscar Brodski' that I said '...the danger of delay; the vital importance of instant action before that frail and fleeting thing that we call a clue has time to evaporate'. I suggest that you apprehend the 'Man of Mystery' first of all."

"But we still don't know who he is, that is to say, we don't know who he will be," Melchisedech said.

"In that case, find out who he is first of all," said the doctor, "and then apprehend him second of all."

"One of the answers is to be found in the eighth movement of Andreyev's *Zauberkonzert*," said the expert who was codenamed Philo Vance. "Or, really, the answer may be found in the eighth movement of anything at all, but not so clearly. If you have any feeling for African Violets, you will clearly understand the answer. I would recommend, however, that African Violets be felt for themselves alone. See my celebrated monogram 'The Unutility of African Violets'. A consummate cribbage boardman will know the answer instantly, as will a master of the Round-The-Mountain maneuver at American checkers."

"I dispute you there, Mr. Vance," said Melchisedech Duffey. "I am the master of the Round-The-Mountain trick at checkers, but I do not know the answer to the problem of keeping the person codenamed 'The Man of Mystery' off of the *Argo*. Myself, when I really know the answer to a thing, I can usually state it in three words."

"Oh certainly, I could do that also," Philo Vance said.

"Well, what *are* your three words, Philo?" Duffey asked him.

"Get a dog," said the master of detection.

"The hardest man to throw out of a place is the man who is already outside," said codenamed Father Brown, "and the hardest man to prevent entering a place is the man who is already inside. Well, it's been a pleasure, gentlemen. And since Philo and the others have already solved the problem for you, I will bid you all good day. Remind me not to walk directly off the ship until a plank or ladder or device of some sort is provided. I am absent-minded about such things, and sometimes I get a good drenching that way. You know that the original meaning of 'drench' in Old English is to drown, but I don't want to apply this meaning to myself."

"But *has* the problem been solved?" Brannagan asked. "*Do* we know how to deal with the 'Man of Mystery' and how to keep him off our Ship? What, after all, has Philo Vance told us?"

"Perhaps an English Bulldog would be the best sort of dog in this case," Father Brown said. "If you know one you can trust, get him. The English Bulldog will most quickly realize it when something familiar begins to turn into something strange and wrong. Deal with it quickly when that moment arrives."

"I'll do it," Melchisedech said. "I'll get an English Bulldog. I know one I can trust." The Argo Masters sent the codenamed detectives and scrutinizers back to their stations, whether in life or out of it.

"Not Gunboat Smith," Kasmir Gorshok said with a touch of worry after the detectives had gone.

"Yes, Gunboat Smith," Melchisedech insisted. "That is one English Bulldog that I trust all the way."

"But Gunboat never liked me," Kasmir said. "We just don't get along well enough together to be on the same ship."

"Gunboat Smith it will be," Melchisedech said with heavy finality. And it was but a short adventure to pick up Gunboat

Smith where he was Bulldog-in-Residence at the Old Wooden Ship Tavern in Galveston, Texas.

There was a lot of growling on the *Argo* for the next several days. Gunboat Smith growled at Kasmir Gorshok, and Kasmir Gorshok growled at Gunboat Smith. But otherwise the Ship was in good shape. Closed circuit burglar alarms were installed at every passageway and rat line of the *Argo*, and the firedrakes were on constant patrol. It would seem that no person could enter the *Argo* uninvited, either by air or by land or sea, or from under the sea.

But phenomena of every sort were surrounding and infiltrating the ship in their multitudes. Something from their still poorly-defined aggregation was trying to board the *Argo*, or was already paying homage to somebody on the *Argo*. There was the beginning of something familiar turning strange and wrong. Gunboat Smith let them know about it as well as he could, but they all felt it.

"Has he come already?" Biloxi asked, "and has he been given authority over the world?"

The *Argo* was picking up an entourage of ships and boats, large and small, and some of them of unrecognizable flag and registry. There were musical sounds from the sea, but these were of a greatly different music from that which had accompanied the *Argo* when it was carrying Count Finnegan and Gilberto and Herman Hercules. The sea itself was something that was turning wrong and strange. There was a new magnetic wind blowing. Strangeness isn't to be classified too quickly.

The musical sound that accompanied them now (or was it an anti-musical sound?) was possessed of a different magnetism. It was as if consensus and polarity had been abrogated. The ears of Duffey and Brannagan and Gunboat Smith bled a bit in those hours. New and dazzling things were happening to smell and vision, and even to tactile feeling. There was a pleasant clamminess in the air. Can

there be a pleasant clamminess? Something new in excitement and fascination was creating itself.

The Ship *Argo* was following a course of her own selection, or perhaps she had been instructed by persons unknown to follow this course. She was moving eastward at a fair speed, but not at full *Argo* speed. She was not (as she usually was) moving against the winds and waves. Now she was carried along by the winds and waves (winds and waves that had obviously been tampered with). And those winds and waves were paying open homage to the *Argo* or to someone on board of her.

"Morning sickness? Me? Morning sickness!" Melchisedech moaned one morning, and he was sicklied all over with a new dullness.

"I've got it too, Duffey," Brannagan said. "I'm just like a landsman on his first rough sea. Have you noticed the sea though? It's different. It's of a different texture and aim and intent. Duff, it's paying homage to a different thing. I had a discussion with some fellows once. What, we considered, if the materialists and secularists are right, and there are no things beyond? What if there be no aim or intent? What if there be a different aim or intent to it all? What would the sea be like then? Those were all fellows who knew the many faces of the sea well.

"The sea would be glassy, they argued. It would swell and it would trough, but it would still be of a dull and opaque glass. It would heave, perhaps, but it would not crest. They had all seen such seas for very brief moments. But the sea, by ordinary, pays true homage, pays brilliant homage, and it is not of that opaque glassiness. We see the wrong ocean now."

"And I will heave, perhaps in a moment," Duffey said, "but I will not crest. Yes, what homage the sea is paying this morning is to a different thing. What homage my own stomach is paying is different and wrong, but I may get to like it a little. I know too what the world would look like, if it

were secular. I've seen snatches and pieces of such a world: places where, in the autumn, the leaves turn from green to dull brown with no brilliant interval; tropical trashlands where it does not lighten or thunder at all; steppe lands where it goes to deep snow and deep freeze with neither rime frost nor hoar frost coming first; swamps too dismal to have swamp lights or fox fire or St. Elmo's fire. Ah, I do feel queasy this morning, Brannagan, and I do think queasy. In my black little heart, it seems as if I would welcome all the brilliant things going out, and the new brotherhood and new regularity coming in."

"I'm sick too, Duffey," said Brannagan, "and it bothers me that it doesn't—ah—bother me a lot more. Ulp! Such pleasant retching I've never known before. I can see why the thing's attractive to most. It's a new form of expression. I'm less a man than I was yesterday, and it doesn't bug me out. Have you heard what rot that piece of talking oak in the Ship's wheel has been talking lately? It's all other seas and other plaudits now, Duffey. Why does it bother us so little?"

"That piece of talking oak in the Ship's wheel, it says that it has been baptized in the spirit and is speaking in tongues now. There's more than a thousand craft following us and surrounding us, Brannagan. What is the big attraction? Above all the other atmospheric changes, it is becoming more shimmery now, which means that we are even further and more uncertainly into the future. It may break at any time and send us back into one of the presents, or cast us up on one of the shores of the 'Lost Years Sea'. If it is going to happen, I hope that it happens before the *Argo* and ourselves disgrace ourselves. Do you believe that the things may, by their numbers and their confusions around us, succeed in getting the codenamed 'Man of Mystery' onto the *Argo*? And why does the general stickiness become less and less sticky until it is nearly tolerable?"

Aye, maybe you'd get to like that regularized sea and that regularized din also. You'd get to like the false

regularization and acceptance that had been done to the people.

"Is it going to be a slow and uneventful event, this taking us over?" Brannagan asked. "What do you think, Duffey? What do you think Gunboat?"

No, it wasn't completely uneventful. Just after sundown that night, events began to happen. One of the effigy seamen came and said that the compass in the binnacle was awry. The needle deformed itself and kept pointing at something on the Ship itself, something below decks.

"It is the magnetism," the effigy seaman said. "It is a personal magnetism that deforms needles."

"We feel it," said Melchisedech.

There was a series of sharp explosions on the *Argo*. Exploration revealed that every mirror on the Ship was shattered, but not a piece of glass had fallen from any of them. One looked in the glass now, and saw himself in a thousand aspects, a different reflection in each shattered segment. This was cubism come into the world as actuality. Then, when one looked away from the mirror, one saw the whole world as shattered and cubistic.

"It's the only way to see the world," another effigy seaman said. "This is the new depth and dimension, the freedom from integrity. Praise it, praise it!"

"Oh shut up!" Melchisedech said.

Very many people were on the *Argo*. Gunboat Smith had near bitten the legs off of many of them, and still they came. They were coming over the sides of the ship. They were coming up from the depths of it. There would be no way to keep out the 'Man of Mystery' with so many unidentified people coming in. But Brannagan and Duffey now knew that the 'Man of Mystery' had been on the *Argo* for quite some time.

People cried out in tongues, and talking dogs interpreted what they said. Gunboat Smith was not able to come to any

of the talking dogs, though he railed furiously against them. The world had changed, or it had somehow been given over to a queer power.

And there was a real attraction to the power. The *Argo* was going at a still greater rate towards the East, though there was no longer any way of verifying directions; and the smell of hot and rocky land was near. This was the abomination of desolation that was spoken of in the prophets; and it was entirely too attractive an abomination.

A crooked peace had settled over everything. All breathing stopped. Then the Great One appeared, out of the bowels of the *Argo*.

Breathing began once more, but at a different pace. The world still moved, but not as it had moved before. The Great One appeared in colors that had been long outlawed, and the noise that greeted his appearance ruptured ears and sent double red streams down every head on all the ships and boats of the retinue.

"It's getting more and more shimmery," Brannagan said, "and this is not all the effect of the 'great' event that seems to be happening. We've just gone a little further into the future than we should. But how do we go back?"

"I think we can go back simply by refusing it," Duffey guessed, "but all these poor people cannot go. They live in this time and they are deluded in this time. And the Holy *Argo* cannot go back until she brings her mysterious passenger to land."

The Apparition, the Man of Mystery, the Mystery of Evil, the Master of the World for That Time, the 'He Who Must Come First', stood there in glory, but the glory was made out of tampered-with light. And yet that's the only kind of light there was left.

He was Peleus, he was Kasmir Gorshok, he was Prince Casimir, he was Casey Szymansky of Chicago and of the Zodiac, and he was the Antichristus. And this was his world. There were paeans heaped up on mountainous sound. There

was worldwide adoration on the spherical screen of the apparition-sphere.

The *Argo* landed at Habonim where the hilly 'Plains of Megiddo' began, and from there this Prince Kasimir who was the Antichristus would rule the world for his period. Then he would destroy the world in the last big battle. It became more and more shimmery.

But Duffey was solidly back into his own flesh. No bones—only man was he now. There was a returning to basics for him.

There must have been a million people waiting on that shore, and most of them were the high notables of the world. There were very few of the five billion people of the world who didn't accept it. Every compass needle of the world pointed to the Plains of Megiddo now. It was the new center of the new earth, and the Antichrist was king of the earth. And what sort of elect was it that remained undeceived, though powerfully influenced?

Only three of them there that we know of, and some would find them a little bit shabby.

"I wonder why Casey didn't sweep us in too," Brannagan said. "I never knew that he had such power. We're lucky to have escaped him here, and to be able to escape out of here."

"A false prophet is not without honor, save on his own ship," Melchisedech said.

"Thank God for the shimmering," Gunboat Smith growled. "We're fading out of it and leaving it to itself. What, the *Argo* had disappeared while we gaze here with the noddies on the shore. She'll be the object of our new search for a while."

"Aye, but I seem to see myself rediscovering her, in disguise and in the hands of a sly hull dealer in New Orleans many years from now," Melchisedech said. "There, or somewhere else we'll find her. Till then, my friends!"

“We go back,” Gunboat growled. “We couldn't stop that kinky future this time. Maybe we will stop it the next time, if we're capable of learning anything.”

“Gunboat, Gunboat,” Brannagan chided him. “From the unholy talking dogs who had caught the false spirit, you have picked up the unholy habit of talking. Give the evil and unseemly thing over. Yes, we have failed to stop it this time. Possibly we have failed to stop it many times, and we are not even sure there is another chance. Well, we go back, one way or the other, and we fade out—”

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Biloxi Brannagan faded out first. Gunboat Smith, after a deep and comprehending growl to indicate that he would never again indulge in unholy dog talk, faded out next. The entire Surroundings and ambient were gone—

And Duffey himself was fading out of there, and fading in somewhere else, in another time and place. Duffey was swimming in doubtful water, and perhaps he was drowning in it. Then the ocean became a little more cheerful, a little more self-assured as it were. “If I'm drowning I may as well drown cheerfully,” Duffey said in an aside to himself. No, the whole of his life did not flash before his eyes in those fragments or seconds, but significant pieces of his early life did flash before him.

There were the times when he had been the Boy King of Salem and had done magic. And he'd had black giants to serve him. He had made birds out of clay and flung them into the air and they flew.

A couple of millennia later in his boyhood, in Iowa and in other places, he had been the Boy King in disguise. There also he had had black giants to command, but they were invisible to all except himself. There were early years where he was shuffled from one set of false kindred to other sets of

false kindred. There was the forever blessed boarding school where a few persons (Sebastian Hilton, John Rattigan, Lily Koch), understood that he really was a king in disguise. There was Charley Murray who did magic tricks while Duffey did real magic. But Charley, his best friend, had a better line of patter, and was more applauded than was Melchisedech.

The sky and the water had become younger now, and it was foolish to fear that one might die by drowning. There was the exuberance of youth on everything.

There had been the meteoric gold-touched business venture in St. Louis. There was the foster brother Bagby. There was the Rounder's Club, as fine a club as any in the world. There was Sister Mary Louise. There was Olga Sanchez of the torchy shoulders, Helen Platner of the Bavarian Club, Papa Piccone of the Star and Garter Club, Beth Keegan who was an ivory statuette.

And following that, Melchisedech, then probably being in his seventeenth year, in a very early morning, had walked out on the river shore low-lying boat that had been the *Argo* in disguise. Oh happy water, he was very near that place again.

"I had forgotten how wonderful it was to be not quite seventeen," he chuckled to himself. Then he quoted "I shall arrive. What time, what circuit first, I ask not." What a time to be quoting Browning. A new joy, even a glee, had taken over everything. It was a young ocean now and a young sky over it. There were youthful sea creatures and river creatures, possibly not entirely authentic, cavorting around him with happy noises. They looked a little bit like creatures in certain comic paintings that Finnegan had done long ago. Long ago from when? Just how old was Finnegan now?

It was the year 1923 and Duffey was quite a young man. Finnegan (John Solli) had been born June 1, 1919 so he was about four years old and hadn't done any significant painting yet. Now it was the year 1923 and Melchisedech

Duffey swam at the same time out of the 'Sea of Lost Years' and out of the young and joyously muddy Mississippi River. He climbed onto the shore just below the Eads Bridge in St. Louis, MO. He has never been so happy in any of his lives. He was twenty-three years old and no age is happier than that.

"Oh, I see by your face how young and handsome I am," he cried in joy to Pseudo-Melchisedech who was standing before him there looking very young-mannish and very sad. "It isn't permitted to be sad, not when you're so happy," Melchisedech told the creature.

"You have now lived through the lost years of your life seven times," the young and sad creature told Melchisedech, "and you've died seven deaths. These lives and these deaths have been widely different. You know that, don't you?"

"Not consciously, but, yes, I've known it," said Happy Duffey. "You've known that each set of your lost years were pretty sketchy, haven't you? That you've lived only selections of those world years?"

"Absolutely no!" Duffey declared. "What I have lived, I've lived fully. There's been nothing sketchy about it."

"Have you any idea why this has happened to you?"

"Because I am a Magician, a Magus," Melchisedech spoke out of his youthful joy. "And also because (I hate to say this about so great an entity) because God doesn't quite know how to end the World Affair. He's started many things, but he's never ended anything yet. And the endings are the hardest. I think he's using myself and various other of his Magicians to explore various endings."

"Do you really think so? Oh, no, no, you laughing Judas! That wouldn't be possible. You do know that after three of your deaths you were damned to Hell."

"And after the other four of them I wasn't," Melchisedech spoke happily. "So I'm ahead of the game. And I know that the rehearsals are over with, or that they were an illusion.

Now I must play my happy role in the last five or six decades of the world. And this time we will do it without the instructions that were given us during the rehearsals. I do not understand it at all, and I'm happy that I don't. Some of those who have other roles may understand it. But I'm twenty-three years old, probably for the last time, and the world is my oyster."

"Do you know what I am?" the strange and boyish double of Melchisedech Duffey asked him.

"I know that you are an Angel," Melchisedech said. "But there are two sorts of them. Are you an Angel of God or of the Devil?"

"Of God," said the creature. "Yes, I'm quite certain of that."

"Look, pale reflection of myself," Melchisedech crowed, "I've just had a seven part daydream or hallucination. And whether each part of it lasted one minute or seventy years is no matter. It seems now that the whole thing was no more than one minute.

"The world is a kaleidoscope, ever-changing, ever-enchanting, did you know that, My Reflection? And one best strides happily laughing and singing through it. And the fact that one is striding through the hot ashes of Hell every step of the way is no reason to be less merry. If one looks down and sees that he is no more than ankle-deep in Hell, let him continue with a happy heart. But if he sees that he is more than knee-deep in Hell, then he must, then he must, what must he do then, pale reflection of me?"

"I don't know," said the creature with its paler face of Duffey.

"Maybe that's when he should leave the land for a while and walk on the water," Melchisedech declared. "Remember, Reflection, that man in his original nature was able to walk on water. He is still able to do it, but sometimes he forgets that he is." Then Melchisedech Duffey turned and ran to the city singing happily.

"I lied to him and I lied to myself," said the unhappy Angel who wore Duffey's face. "No, no, I'm not certain at all which one of them I serve. I'm afraid to be certain or even to think about it. Is it God or the Devil that I serve in my confusion and darkness?"

But Melchisedech Duffey, singing happily, was into the city in the bright morning. And he didn't hear the creature at all.



And so ends R. A. Lafferty's masterful conclusion to MORE THAN MELCHISEDECH.

Or does it?

We shall quote from that ruddy-faced, near-genius Enniscorthy Sweeny on the matter.

“An event is like a box or other geometrical object,” Ennis would say, “and it should be pretty much the same no matter which side it is viewed from. Let us say that we look at it from the south side (that is the past), or from the east side (that is the present), or from the west side (that is an alternative (!!!-ed.) present), or from the north side (that is the future). The event will look a little bit different from these various viewpoints, but not much. You must not reject one view of it when you come to another view. They are all equally parts of it.”

Let us turn our faces to the west then—to that alternate reality which “should not be rejected” .

Direction! Direction! Should we run rampant over all the 45 degrees of the thing?

No. No, of course not. We shall plot a course for south south-west to begin and let the sun in its course draw us where it will.

Turn back now. Turn back the pages until you find this sign:

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And then, after re-acquainting yourself with the compass points, read on!

Biloxi Brannagan faded out first. Gunboat Smith, after a deep and comprehending growl to signify that he would never again indulge in unholy dog-talk, faded out also. The entire surroundings and ambient were gone — the congress of ships and boats and the land itself.

So, for the moment, or for the regression of the moment, there faded out the whole coming of the Antichrist who had possibly deceived all but three people in the world, and one of them a dog.

And Duffey himself was fading out of there and fading in somewhere else, in another time and place. Duffey was swimming in —

Hold everything right there! The hour grows early again, and there will never be a better place for some short notes on the nature of time and related things. The things related to time are aeon and eternity.

Time is the measure of the duration of material creatures and substances. It is the numbering of the successiveness of material change. Things that do not change do not have a beginning and end, and do not display successiveness. An instant of time is imperfect, and anything that is imperfect may be added to. Suppose that one lives only every odd millisecond of an instant, or every third millisecond of it? He would still be living with successiveness and would still be living through imperfect instants. Then those instants could, in another successiveness, be added to. This would not be living that instant twice, though it would resemble it very closely. But all of this is sophistry.

There is only one time.

Aeon is the measure of the duration of non-material creatures or substances, as time is that of material creatures or substances. Thomas writes "Although the aeon is instantaneously whole, it differs from eternity in being able

to exist with before and after.” There is one aeon for every immaterial individual and for every immaterial relationship. Some aeons apply only to the non-material aspects of individuals and relationships. A person who is partly material and partly immaterial will be sometimes in time and sometimes in aeon.

There are more aeons than one.

Eternity lacks both beginning and end. It exists as a single instant lacking successiveness but having immeasurable depth. Eternity is perfect, and anything that is perfect cannot be added to.

There is only one eternity.

Boethius says: “The flowing instant produces time and the abiding instant eternity.”

Augustine says: “Eddying thoughts have no part in the saints' vision of the world.”

Thomas says: “Time and eternity clearly differ. But certain people make the difference consist of time having a beginning and an end whilst eternity has neither. Now this is an accidental and not an intrinsic difference... eternity is an instantaneous whole, whilst time is not; eternity measuring abiding existence and time measuring change.”

There is an old school-boy argument that states that, since eternity does not have a beginning, then obviously it has not begun; and that the abiding existence is not yet.

There is only one Lord of Time and of Eternity.

This is the end of the short notes on time and related things.

Melchisedech Duffey was swimming in wrong water that was like opaque glass. And quite possibly he was drowning in it. No, the whole of his life did not flash before his eyes in those fragments of seconds, but significant pieces of his life and lives did flash to him.

There were the times when he had been the Boy King of Salem and had done magic. He had had black giants to

serve him. He had made birds out of clay, and flung them in the air. And they flew.

There were the times when, in Iowa and other places, he had been the Boy King in Disguise. Then he had black giants to command also, but they were invisible. There were the early years when he was shuffled from false kindred to other false kindred. There were the blessed boarding schools where a few persons, Sebastian Hilton, John Rattigan, Lily Koch, understood that he was really a King in Disguise. There was Charley Murray who did magic tricks while Duffey did real magic.

There was the meteoric gold-touched business venture in St. Louis. There was the foster-brother Bagby. There was the great Rounder's Club, as fine a club as was to be found in the world. There was the sister Mary Louise. There was boxing and promotion. There was the string band. There was Olga Sanchez of the torchy shoulders, Helen Platner of the Bavarian Club, Papa Piccone of the Star and Garter, Beth Keegan who was an ivory statuette.

There was the flaming love for objects of art. There was St. Malachy's. There were the talismans by which persons would be created or at least awakened. There was a hearty but unexpected leave-taking.

And following that, Melchisedech then being probably in his seventeenth year, in a very early morning, had walked out on a river shore in East St. Louis, just below the Eads Bridge, and had walked right on to a low-lying boat that had been the *Argo* in disguise.

There had been adventures on the *Argo*, and now the adventures were finished for a while. That had been the life of Melchisedech Duffey thus far.

Duffey still heard the words of the vanished Brannagan: "I'm not even sure that it *has* to happen, with as many shimmer lines as there are in the air now. If we three withdraw from it, we make it a little less likely to happen. We help to break the consensus."

Then Duffey was swimming in right water again.

"I shall arrive. What time, what circuit first, I ask not," he was saying. What a time to be quoting Browning. Duffey was swimming in the Sea of the Seven Lost Years, and one can never be sure onto what shore he will come out of that sea.

It was the year 1923, and Duffey was quite a young man. He swam ashore from the muddy river. He had eddying thoughts and he had come on an eddying way, so perhaps he wasn't a saint all the time. But he was still a Holy Magus in patent and title.

Melchisedech was swimming and drifting easily. It *was* the same river and the same town where he always came out of the Sea of the Seven Lost Years. He touched the shore just below the Eads Bridge. It was the river town St. Louis. But just below the high bridge there was a little bob-tailed fishing pier that he had never noticed before. A young boy was sitting on the end of the pier and dangling a line in the water.

"Holy cow!" the boy whooped. "How far did you swim?"

"Oh, about eight thousand miles," Duffey called easily, "but the current was in my favor."

"Funny man, you remind me of something funny. I think that Manatee is the name for it."

"And you remind me of something funny, young fellow," Melchisedech panted as he lunged onto the shore. "I think that Stranahan is its name."

"My name *is* Stranahan," the boy gaped, "but how did you know?"

"You have the Stranahan sound. There were four sons in a family I knew, Philip, Hugh, Timothy, and Vincent, going from the oldest to the youngest. Which one are you and how old are you?"

"I'm Philip. I'm ten."

"Ah yes. I knew Vincent best, in his later years."

"But there weren't any later years for Vincent. He died when he was five days old. He was born on April 5, 1921 and

he died on April 10, 1921. Is it right with you, old man. You made a funny noise."

"Oh, Vincent, Vincent, sure it's all right now. You were always so droll a kidder. I didn't know you till you winked."

"I can't help it when I wink like that. But I'm not Vincent."

"You winked with Vincent's eyes."

"When Vincent was born his eyes were wide open and everybody called out 'Oh look, he has Philip's eyes; and in the five days before he died I'd sit by his bed and we'd look at each other and understand each other. I believe he could have talked to me, but he seemed to think better of it."

"Well then, Philip with Vincent's eyes, I suppose that everything is still all right. Everything except everything. Where do I start to pick up the pieces? Did you ever know a girl named Teresa Piccone?"

"Yes, she's in the first grade at school. Funny old man, you look at me with somebody else's eyes too. And I'm in the fifth grade at school. She's a comical little Italian girl who carries live pet mice in her pockets."

"That's her. Do they call your house the Cat Castle?"

"Yes. What's your name, funny old man?"

"Melchisedech."

"Nobody is named Melchisedech. Why don't you go out to our house and see our folks? Maybe they can find out what's wrong with you. Do you know where our house is?"

"I do. I'll go there at once. I will see you later, Philip."

Melchisedech went by the Old Stranahan house, the Cat Castle. He recognized the place, almost, but it just wasn't the same. It was like a burlesque of the old house that he'd visited in other years and in other contexts. He didn't make himself known there.

After that, Melchisedech was sitting in a sort of tavern only two blocks from the Cat Castle. It was in the unhappy years when the blight of prohibition was already on the land, and the only bottles on the shelves were bevo and near-beer. But the people there were drinking real beer; for in St. Louis

the people knew all the tricks. Well, everybody except Melchisedech was drinking, but he was not waited on. He shouted and he grew angry, but he soon realized that the people could not see him or hear him.

"So, it's come to that, has it?" he asked somebody, God, or his Angel, or his own inner self. "I ask a sign that there really is such a person as myself. I've come to doubt it and it shatters me. A sign, a sign, for the love of God, give me a sign! Oh, there's the sign. She isn't very big though. Little girl, how old are you?"

"I'm five and a little bit more. I'm in the first grade at school. I saw you looking at the Stranahan house, and then I saw you walk away from it. I was pretty sure who you were, and I saw what kind of trouble you were in. The reason that people can't see you is that you're a ghost, either one who hasn't been born yet or one that has died. The reason that I can see you is that I can see ghosts."

"Are you Teresa Piccone?"

"Of course I am, and you're King Melchisedech. It has to be that I'd meet you sometime even if it was after you were dead. Oh, this is a delight, the way you take off your beard and hang it on your ear. Live people can't do that."

"Maybe some of them can. Can you see other ghosts, Teresa?"

"You mean Vincent, don't you? He died before I was born and it's only this last year that I'm able to talk to him. He says that his seeming to be born was all an illusion, that he was sent to the Stranahans as a good omen. Soon he will really be born, in another part of the country, to another family of very good people. And when that happens, the Stranahans will forget even the illusion of him, but the good omen will be part of them forever. If I were God, I'd make somebody remember Vincent, just for the fun of it."

"I believe that God has done that, Teresa, just for the fun of it. He's made somebody remember Vincent. You."

"Oh yes. Of course I will. I always forget about me. But if the Vincent Stranahan that you remember so well over so many years didn't really live those years, then it casts a big doubt on you, doesn't it?"

"It sure does, little Teresa. It makes it seem that maybe none of my lives happened."

"Maybe with all your ancient memories you forgot to be born? If that's the case, then I think I can fix it up for you. I'll have you be born to me in twenty years or so. I'll just have you, old King Melchisedech, be born to me. Then one at least of your lives will be real. And I believe that if one of them is proved real, all the rest of them will be real too. And in the meantime we'll stay in touch, we can you know, even if it's only playing ghost. And in twenty years or so, I'll have the oldest king in the world as my baby."

"You do give me some slight hope, Teresa."

"And in the meantime, why don't you have some fun? You don't have to be an old ghost. Why don't you be a young ghost? You can be, you know."

"Oh, Oh, Oh, I'll try it, Teresa."

Melchisedech Duffey walked down by the Eads bridge, and he looked at Philip Stranahan sitting on the little bob-tailed fishing pier and dangling a line in the water.

"Which of us is the ghost, Philip?" he called up to the boy.

"You know my name. Hey, did your grandfather find you a while ago? He seemed to be looking for somebody and I believe it must have been you. You look just like him only about fifty years younger. Did he find you?"

"I and the grandfather are one," Melchisedech said.

What? What? Yes, it was the year 1923 again, and Melchisedech was twenty-three years old, one of his favorite ages.

"And if Teresa, in twenty years or so, gives me a valid life, then all of my lives will have been valid. But what will that do to Philip sitting there? Philip shows a touch of the hazy

unreality. Better he than me.” Then Melchisedech began to sing.

“Oh, it's great to be young and in danger,
Hi Ho!
It's great to be young in the morning!”

“But it's afternoon, man,” Philip Stranahan protested. “I fish here in the early morning and in the late afternoon too.”

“I am twenty-three years old, Philip, and I can be twenty-three years old again and again and again. And how many times can you be ten years old? My ghost is more solid than your ghost. In this new life, in this ever-flowing multiplicity of new lives, it shall officially be ‘In The Morning’ for all twenty-four hours of every day. I'll settle for nothing less.”

APPARENT END

AN ESSAY EXPLAINING THE ALTERNATE ENDINGS OF THE BOOK ARGO In the Course of Which I'm Obligated to Explain The Detailed Workings of The World Itself

The editor-publisher of these books has asked me to "compose the finishing essay for the final book **ARGO**, explaining the alternate endings."

"Yes, sure," I told myself, and I started to sketch the outline for a two or three page essay on the subject. "This will be easy," I said. And in a minute I added "This will be harder than I thought."

Then something took possession of my hand and wrote words that were not my words at all.

"The book **ARGO** seems to have alternate endings because everything and everybody in the World seems to have alternate endings. That's the way all the Worlds and all the people in them are made. That is the Detailed Working of the World Itself. But the endings do not really end."

The business of somebody or something else writing with my hand scared me. It plunged me into darkness and despondency. I sat down then and wrote a letter to the Editor-Publisher. "I don't know how to write this essay. It's impossible." But I didn't mail that letter. I kept it three days and then I tore it up.

I said to myself "I'll do the impossible for him. If people didn't do the impossible now and then, things would never be done. And if it is required that somebody should explain the detailed workings of the world, that somebody might as well be me."

I began with my own writings and with **ARGO** as the latest. It seemed, until I thought of it a bit, that I had written quite a few novels, and many shorter works, and also verses and scraps. Now I understood by some sort of intuition that what I had been writing was a never-ending story and that the name of it was 'A GHOST STORY'. The name comes from the only thing that I have learned about all people, that they are ghostly and that they are sometimes split-off. But no one can ever know for sure which part of the split is himself. "Is this myself, right here and now, or is this the ghost?" is a question that most people, from some shyness, do not ask themselves nearly often enough.

"But what about the people who aren't novelists?" someone asks. "Your sketch applies to only a very small minority of people."

Wrong. The more numerous and vital people *live* their novels (their lives). The less vital and less direct and less effective persons write theirs. But there is not too much difference. Every writer realizes pretty soon that his writings are peopled by real people. Of course they are. Real people are the only kind of people there are.

There was a man named Havelock Ellis (1859-1939) an essayist, editor, physician, psychologist, and publisher of the 'Mermaid Series of Old Dramatists', designed to bring the 17th century dramas to a wider public. This drama revival was one of the great loves of his life: but he had very many great loves in his life. One of them was his fixed idea that there are no common people, that all of us are geniuses, that all of us are absolutely wonderful. He encapsuled this idea in a writing called 'THE LAW OF INTELLECTUAL CONSTANCY'.

The thesis of Havelock was that all persons with brains and bodies not seriously damaged are of about equal power and ability, that a guy who scratches out a slim living on two and a half acres in shantytown is as intelligent and capable *in all ways* as are John D. Rockefeller, or Thomas Alva Edison,

or Wilhelm Wagner, or George Bernard Shaw (G.B. Shaw and Havelock Ellis were very close personal friends), or Victor Hugo, or the President of the United States or of U.S. Steel, or of Alexander Graham Bell, or Henrik Ibsen.

It was simply that peoples' fancies turned to different ways of fulfilling themselves. Ellis, in his work as physician, psychologist, and as forerunner of the psychoanalysts, was thunderstruck by the creative richness of some of the totally unimpressive lower-class people that he turned up. And he remained thunderstruck by such things for ten years or so. People selected the enjoyments that appealed to them and followed them out in lifetimes of high pleasure. And Havelock's 'Mermaid Series of Old Dramatists' found echoes here. Some of the common-uncommon, lowly-but-not-really-so-lowly people were recreating the wonders of the THREE PENNY OPERA or the BEGGARS OPERA in their lives. Some of them exulted in the wonderful world and racy challenges of extreme poverty. It takes as much brains and ability for the very poor to make it as it does for the very rich. Some of the people played with Hell Fire itself and its unholy excitement.

Havelock Ellis was a little bit before his time with his LAW OF INTELLECTUAL CONSTANCY. The people who were manufacturing the current thinking of the world considered themselves very superior people, and they would not easily admit that they were barely equal to the lowest of the lowest. Yet, in less than a decade they adjusted to it. They admitted that there was such a thing as 'occult compensation' which compensated the underlings for being underlings, but it wasn't really a threat so long as it remained sufficiently 'occult'. And a little bit later, though buried under a mountain of words, it was admitted that the LAW OF INTELLECTUAL CONSTANCY was true, but not really very important on a working level. And such is still the case with it today. But it is important as a cornerstone to the explanation of the Detailed Workings of the World Itself.

It is established that the human race is made up entirely of glowing geniuses. That's something. And it's pretty well established that the begeniused human race is totally ghostly in all the meanings of the word, that it is overflowing so that very often persons cannot be contained in a single body, that it runs pretty much on multiple and parallel tracks. It's agreed that every human person is really two or three different persons when in an overflowing mood. ("As many as *Nine* different persons," an Irish hero hollers from several hundred years in the past.)

The psychoanalyst C.G. Jung (mostly in the essay 'Aion') argued that the human person was made up of the Ego, the Self, the Shadow, and those opposing twins the Anima and the Animus. That's five persons in us and he hints at quite a few more.

But can these different persons in the PERSON be physically separate and visible? They can be, but not as a usual thing. But in certain hysterias and raptures and hilarities and exuberances and plain High Spirits (when the Ghost hangs high) the various persons of an individual may be seen, and have been seen, with various degrees of clarity. In all really meaningful moments a human may be seen in his multiplicity. This is another item of the Detailed Workings of the World Itself.

But it makes most persons nervous to see even a single ghost, and to see a group of them makes most persons very nervous. Nevertheless, almost everybody in his lifetime will see some person in his duality or his multiplicity. And this 'almost everybody' will mumble "I must be seeing things" , and he will try mightily to put the 'seeing' out of his mind and out of his memory.

The Irish hero-giant Fingal was commonly attended by nine fetches or doubles of himself. He himself would be clad in a mantle of white sheep wool and the nine fetches would

be clad in mantles of black sheep wool. But Fingal was known as a trickster almost as much as as a hero-giant. The people would laugh and say "Show how you are really doing that." And Fingal would say "*I am* showing you how I'm really doing this."

Nevertheless, every recorded visibility of a person as a multiplicity is testimony to the Detailed Workings of the World Itself.

Charles the First, King of Great Britain, was sometimes accompanied by a beheaded ghost of himself, as an omen of what death Charles himself should die. This beheaded ghost spoke with a heavy voice out of its severed throat. It is said that it sometimes spoke stunning things of prophecy and wisdom. But other members of the Court insisted that the beheaded ghost spoke nothing but absolute silliness. Nevertheless, this is a piece of evidence that really unusual things have sometimes happened.

Melchisedech Duffey once signed a letter to Absalom Stein as "Melchisedech, King of Salem, 59th King of the Dynasty." And when he was later asked about this by Stein he said "Oh, I don't know why I wrote that, but I'm sure that it's correct. It's always been deep in my mind that I've had fifty-eight predecessors."

After that, Absalom wrote in his notebook "I wonder what my own dynastic number is in my own dynasty? I'm sure that all of us Argonauts can remember our own dynastic numbers if there is reason for us to do so. Oh, one of us dies. And then his dynastic successor is born. And the successor will sometimes (as often is necessary) have rapport with some or many of the previous dynastic rulers. Or, and this is an equal possibility, he will have rapport with some of the *future* dynastic rulers. God is tricky, God is remarkably good-natured, God is highly inventive. I believe that many of the

wonderful people that he has made often run on multiple tracks, both in time and space. And I believe that all of the people he has made are wonderful.”

“Once we were indeed Lords of the World. We still are.

“Once time stood still when we ordered it to do so. It still does.

“Once we had the transmuting touch. We have it yet.

“Once we could walk through walls or walk on water. We still can.

“Once we could move mountains. Haven't you heard the good news? We can still move them.

“We can still do all these good things. But sometimes we half-forget that we are able to do them.”

—RIDDLE WRITERS OF THE ISTHMUS. Auctore.

These thunderous powers, whether we use them or whether we forget to use them, stand up like giants among the Detailed Workings of the World Itself.

Now all I have to do to answer the questions is answer them. Why are there alternate endings to the book **ARGO**?

There aren't. There aren't any endings at all. A cross-cut of the multiplicities may seem like a bunch of endings, but that is only a seeming. It is a forward surge on multiple tracks of multiple powers, and it still goes on. It does not end. Because that is the way the world works. That is the simple explanation of the detailed workings of the world itself.

The people of the world are none of them common, are all of them geniuses, are all of them wonderful. So the power is always there, and the great overspilling of the multiplicity and the power. All the people are ghostly, and all of them are split or exploding people. They have rapport with all

their fellows in time and in space, with all of them now in the world, with all of them who have been or will be in the world.

I have answered the Impossible question which proved easy. Still impossible, but easy. Why were there alternate endings? There weren't. It only seemed so, but there was never any hint of anything ending.

I am also happy that I was able to explain the detailed workings of the World Itself.

THANK YOU ALL

— *R.A.Lafferty*

Tulsa, Ok.

Great Day In The Morning

*This is the sea (nor shores, nor strands):
This is the clock that has no hands.*

"Great Day coming, Mr. Duffy," a young black boy called to him. "Great Day just got here."

"Is this the Day Itself, Mike?" Melchisedech Duffy asked him.

"This is the Great Day. It come, it come," the young boy insisted.

"Why, then it has come," Duffy told himself, "and I wouldn't even have noticed it except for the words of a youngster."

It was about an hour before dawn, before the dawning of the Great Day, perhaps.

"We will have to fix your watch," a big, suddenly appearing young man said, and he had a hammer in his hand.

"Begone, man," Melchisedech growled at him, "or it's that I will stop *your* clock."

But the big young man had two fellows with him who were even larger than himself. They all reeled and wobbled a bit, but they were more drunken in their heads than in their legs. It was still quite early, before sunup. Melchisedech had been taking a brisk, early walk through the littered streets.

"Hold him!" the first man said sharply, and the other two fellows pinioned Duffy. He rolled them around; he didn't pinion easily. He rattled and shook them, almost shook them loose, though they were much larger and younger than himself. But the first man had Duffy's wrist in a crushing grip. He turned the hand and wrist over and exposed the watch. With curious care he smashed the glass of the watch

with the hammer, gently, most gently. How does one smash a glass gently with a hammer? Then, with even more studious care, the man shook out every glass sliver and sparkle and powdery fragment.

"Easy now, old man, very easy," he said. "We wouldn't want to damage the watch, would we?"

"You smash it with a hammer, and then you say 'We wouldn't want to damage it, would we?' " Melchisedech fumed. "You're mad. Let me go!"

"We are not mad," that first and main man of them said. "Madness is of the old day, and we're of the New. Hold him tighter, men, for just an instant more." Himself, he held the wrist and hand of Melchisedech much tighter. "You are probably hopeless, old wineskin," he told Duffy, "but even you must realize that time is not overly particularized on the Great Day." With absolute precision he reached in, neatly broke off and removed the minute hand from the watch, then let go of hand and wrist. "Let him go," he said to the other two oversized young men, and they let Melchisedech go.

"And just what was that for?" Melchisedech demanded, holding his watch to his ear and making sure that it was still running.

"You really don't know?" the main man asked. "I was sure that a wise old man like you would understand it. I'm sorry I had to break the glass, but a crystal of a watch of this type isn't quickly removed. You can have another glass put in. The watch will still show the hours, and the minutes will not matter. This is a concession we make to some of the old ones; they do not realize immediately that time in the Great Day is not what it was before."

"For the first two centuries of clock (not watch) manufacture, minute hands were not used," Melchisedech said, waiting for an opening to land one (Oh for an opening to land one!). "The makers were right, *then*, not to use them.

An overprecision hits too close in early days. The makers would be almost, but not quite, right not to use them now."

"Then you do understand," the man said, "but you are maintaining that the idea is not new with us. It has to be new. Everything has to be new today. This is the great thing happening and it has to be happening for the first time. We *are* original. This *is* the great thing."

"Nah," old Melchisedech said. "Original you are not, and I doubt that this is the great thing. When it comes, it will not come with such harbingers as yourselves."

"Admit that we are original, or we will do something really original to your face!" the man cried, becoming very drunk in an instant.

"You'll not manhandle me!" Duffy shouted. Great Day or not, here was the great opening that he had been waiting for. He landed one on the man coming in, he clouted him in the mouth and dropped him to a stunned and sitting position on the sidewalk. Then Melchisedech upset the other two men somehow (they had become much more wobbly) with pushing, blows, and shouting. He left the three of them there in a heap. There is honest satisfaction in such doings.

"You'll spoil it, old flintskin, old muleskin, old camelskin," the main man blubbered from the sidewalk. "All old muleskins should be cast away. They'll burst otherwise, and it'll all run out and that portion will be lost."

There had to be something irrelevant here, like a picture without a frame, like a sea without a shore. Melchisedech Duffy left the three downed men and continued on his thoughtful way. He often had such encounters on his early-morning walks. That was half the fun of walking before the sun was up. But there was the nagging feeling that the sun wouldn't come up on an ordinary day.

On the Great Delta Insurance Company Building, high up there in the tower, three other young men were doing something dogged and dangerous. They had swung open the front of the big tower clock. They attacked the hands

with hacksaws. They cut them both off to stubs, the hour hand as well as the minute hand. They swung shut the front of the big clock then, and began to climb down from the tower. And one of the young men fell to the street and was killed.

"It's the clock without hands that was foretold in such murky manner by Nostradamus," Melchisedech said. "It's another name for the turning-over, for the change that isn't a change. There cannot be change when time is not running. But, no, I will not accept this as the turning, as the thing, as the Great Thing. Yet there was another prophecy: that the metanoia, when it came, would come grotesque and not completely holy."

Melchisedech continued his walk, thoughtful as ever. Had anyone else noticed that so many things had been changing these last few whiles? Melchisedech Duffy must have noticed it, but he was not yet willing to admit it to himself. He believed in a substantial universe made out of substantial people and things. Take substance away from the universe and what do you have left?

If anything happened, Melchisedech said, he should be the first to know about it. Night people, who might be first on the spot, are drowsy or drunken, and they are inattentive. And Duffy was always first of the morning people.

He went into a coffee shop.

*This is the ewe that has no tup;
This is the coffee without a cup.*

The coffee had a good aroma and a jolting, fair taste. It was coffee to wake up by. But the cup felt funny, and Duffy supposed (looking at it out of the edge of his eye) that it looked funny. Well, coffee people are entitled to get new cups when they will.

The coffee lady was an unmarried young lady, a very much unmarried lady, an intense and relentless young lady.

She hovered over Duffy, as she often did. She was waiting for a reaction, or she was intent on drawing a reaction.

"Don't you spoil it," she said irrationally. "Everyone else has accepted it just the way it is without even looking at it. It's the Great Day, so I know that I can do it. I know I can do it, if you and two or three others like you don't spoil it. What I have is a lot of faith. You can't create something new like this without faith. A lady has to have a lot of faith if she doesn't have a husband."

"True, Charlotte, quite true," Melchisedech said. He saw now what was funny about the coffee cups: there *weren't* any coffee cups. There were five other men in the place, listless, rather sleepy men, and all were drinking coffee without cups.

Duffy had always known that new things, when they came, never came by way of elite folks. They came by way of scramble-brained, intense, humorless, and unilluminated people like—well, like Charlotte here.

Duffy was trying to read his morning paper, and he found it somehow unsatisfactory. He was trying *not* to notice that he was drinking coffee without a cup; he wasn't quite ready for that yet. He was trying *not* to put any meaning to the words of the stringy waitress Charlotte. And yet there were the words:

"I hate cups," she was saying. "I hate glasses. I hate clothes, I hate walls. I hate containers. It isn't right that anything should be contained by anything else. I hate sacks, I hate boxes. If we have faith we can make them all go away. It has to start with somebody. I believe that it has already started with me. I had a feeling that this would be a special morning."

"I have a great fear that it is, Charlotte," Melchisedech said. There was something more than wrong about the morning paper; there was something rotten about it. And there was something that would have to be acknowledged

about the cups, that would have to be acknowledged absently.

"You're the one I worry about more than any of my early-morning customers," Charlotte was saying. "If I blow it in the early morning, I've blown it for all day. And you're just the one to make me blow it. I bet you have clothes on under your clothes and skin on under your skin. You're an old skinsack, that's what you are, an old container. And you are the most contained man I know."

"Self-contained, Charlotte?"

"That's right. Ugh! It isn't decent for anything to be contained. It isn't right for there to be any containers. I have it started now. Don't spoil it."

The newspaper was intolerable; and the diminished coffee in the cup (whup, no cup!) was cold. Melchisedech raised his remnant coffee to Charlotte, and by coincidence the five other customers had all raised their coffee to their mouths at once.

"A little of the hot, Charlotte," Melchisedech said.

"Don't spoil it," she warned as she started to pour. "If you don't have faith, then don't look at it so close. I'm telling you, don't spoil it."

Melchisedech spoiled it. The cold remnant burst and ran down his hand and wrist. And the scalding hot coffee poured by Charlotte cascaded over his hand and down his arm to set him howling with pain. After all, what does happen when someone pours boiling hot coffee in your bare hand?

And the other five customers had coffee suddenly loosed into their hands. Whoosh! They all rose and shook themselves in stammering and soggy bewilderment to discover that they had been drinking coffee without cups, and that now even the non-cups had collapsed and vanished.

"You spoiled it!" Charlotte shrilled at Melchisedech. "If I had a husband I'd have him shoot you if he had a gun. You ought to be skinned alive, you old crate, you old bagworm,

you old wineskin. All the faith in the world can be sucked into one old skin like you, and then nothing works. You get out of here!"

*This is the paper: no date is in sight,
Nor numbers on pages, nor anything right.*

"Is it possible that I, who have always been so far ahead of the times, have now fallen behind the peasants and the peckerwoods?" Melchisedech Duffy asked himself in a loud and truculent voice. His hand was badly burned and he was flustered generally. "Is it possible that this is really the Great Day dawning, and that I alone lack the grace to comprehend it? Oh well, two things at a time. I'll just go around to that newspaper office, to complain, to cajole, perhaps to correct. But I suspect that the cupless coffee has burned me deeper than my hand."

The morning paper had been as defective as the morning coffee, and in much the same way. It had no date on any of the pages, and the pages were not numbered. It must have been put together by drunken Cajuns working through the night. All the headlines were gathered together on the first two pages (Melchisedech supposed they were the first two pages; they weren't numbered either, and there were no headings at all on any of the stories or articles in the body of the paper).

The whole journal had an odd flavor, fishy or at least amphibian, as though an unmoored thought process were behind it all. The stories just weren't as newspaper stories should be. They didn't tell one anything. They made a person want to shout "What did you say?" at the newspaper. Melchisedech was himself a sometime journalist, and this all seemed like sloppy journalism to him. He twitched his whitish beard in annoyance. It had been the first beard of the late Pleistocene, and (the way things were going) it would likely be the last.

But he was uneasy as he went through the streets toward the newspaper building. It just seemed to him that there was something a little bit different about everything this morning. There was something different about the cars and the buses in the streets, a great but subtle difference; and Duffy could not find a name for it immediately.

He several times narrowly missed death on that three-block walk. One reason for the frightful danger that was abroad was the behavior of the frightful traffic signals. They will be considered in a few minutes: who has the nerve to consider them right now?

And there was something very wrong about the newspaper building itself. It was not exactly that there was any new thing added to it. It was more as if some main thing had been forgotten or removed from it. But Melchisedech Duffy boldly entered the somehow wrong newspaper building, and he entered his outraged protest as he usually did.

"Your paper this morning is weird beyond comprehension," he said to an editorial assistant. Duffy knew the young man slightly, but he could not now remember his name. It was as though the young man's name had been removed on purpose. In any case, the young man had not taken any notice of Melchisedech's sputtering statement. Try again, then.

"Your paper this morning is the worst I have ever seen," Duffy said in an elegant but tight way, and he banged the paper down in front of the young man.

"Why do you say that it is *our* paper?" the young man said. "Everything is everybody's now. You will notice that the paper hasn't any name on it anywhere. Neither do we, the building, I mean."

"That's so," Duffy admitted. "It hasn't and you haven't. I wondered what main thing had been removed from this building. It is that big, gawky sign from your roof that is gone."

"It's the newest thing not to have a name for anything," the young man said, "or for anybody. Names are enslaving. But why do you say that it's this morning's paper? Being undated, it cannot be identified positively as this morning's paper. We believe that this is the Great Day Coming itself, and the Great Day is one that doesn't need a name or a number. Why do you even say that it's a morning paper? It may be an afternoon or an evening or a graveyard-shift paper."

"Aw, jay-walking Judas Priest!" Duffy exploded. "Let me talk to the editor. You can't run a paper like that."

"We are all equally editors here now," the young man said. "We are all equally everything, but we will not use that title or any title. We will do just what work we feel like doing, and the days when we are nothing-minded we will do nothing. We call this job enrichment."

"But I don't believe there will be any paper printed here today. When everything in the world is new, then there can be no such thing as 'news.' We may put out a comic book instead. Reruns of old comics, probably. What do you think?"

"I feel like the rerun of an old comic myself," Melchisedech said. "And you do put me out a bit. How did all these changes happen?"

"All these rectifications, rather. Oh, we noticed that there wasn't anyone of any importance around the paper last night. So a couple of us persons of no importance put it into effect. That's the way major things always happen. The paper really should have been brought out blank, but we're not perfected in the new ways yet."

"Couldn't your paper even have said that your Great Day a-Coming had come? Any explanation is better than none at all."

"It does say so on page—oh, I forgot that pages aren't numbered anymore. It's on one of the back pages. It's a little filler at the bottom."

"I see that there is no sanity here," Melchisedech said. He left the newspaper building, unsatisfied. He noticed that the big, gawky sign hadn't really been removed from the roof of the newspaper building. But it had been felled. It lay in broken pieces, and some of the pieces had fallen into the street. There was a steady sputtering and sparking where the electrical feeders to the big sign had been ruptured. Wires dangled and hissed above the street. "Someone will touch one of those and be killed," Duffy said. Then he noticed that it had already happened. There was a scorched and charred child on the sidewalk, dead and unnoticed by the passersby. But you can't make changes without breaking up old patterns of life.

Melchisedech Duffy, pawnbroker, art dealer, bookseller, part-time personage, stood undecided. He wasn't sure that this was the Great Day, and he wasn't sure that he liked it if it was.

*These are the signals that harry one hence:
These are the beacons that don't make sense.*

Oh, oh, those life-endangering traffic signals once more! There had been a time, no longer ago than last night, when lights were red or green, or they were amber; when the signals said "Go" or they said "Stop" ; when they flashed "Walk" or "Don't walk" when they indicated turns and such things.

But this morning those signals lit up in a hundred different colors or blends of colors; perhaps some of them were subjective, but they could not all be. And the signals flashed such words as "When you feel like it, go," "People's Intersection," "To stop is to die, to stop growing is to die a little," "Shout *Liberty* before crossing," "If you're not part of the confluence you're part of the collision," "Capricorns should not cross any streets today," "Leos should not cross

any streets ever." These weren't the traffic signals that Melchisedech was used to.

"How do you know when to cross the street?" he asked a young lady there. Mighty funny business. Duffy was usually the one to come up with an answer: why did he have to ask this strange young lady?

"It is the Emancipation," the young lady said with some heat, "and old goatskin here wants to know when to cross the street!"

"Don't people cross streets after the Emancipation?" Duffy asked.

"Only emancipated people. Don't you relate at all?" the lady asked crossly.

"No, I don't seem to relate to this," Duffy said. Funnier and funnier. Melchisedech Duffy had almost always related to things, even before they happened.

"People who don't relate are simply not allowed to cross the streets," the young lady laid down the law.

"What do they do if they're not allowed to cross the streets?"

"Oh, I suppose they walk around them," the young lady said.

*This is the world that bans the heels;
These are the cars that don't have wheels.*

The buses, Melchisedech Duffy now saw, no longer had wheels. Many of the trucks had none, and some of the cars had not.

"What happened to all the wheels?" Melchisedech asked a workman.

"You really have to ask that on the Day of total change?" the workman challenged. "If there's one thing worse than a square it's a round. Get out of here, you roundskin, you roundheel." But what did they have in place of wheels?

There was a fog before the eyes as to this, and yet it was a quite clear morning and the sun was nearly up. The vehicles had something else instead of wheels, and they moved along almost as well on this something else. The change seemed to have been a simple one. Even now, workmen as well as owners were taking the wheels off cars and putting on something else, something that came out of a kit.

"Are you sure that that, whatever it is that comes out of the kits, is better than wheels?" Duffy asked a young car owner who was making the changeover himself.

"No, of course not," the man said. "How would it be better? The thought for today is that nothing is any better than anything else. Don't you even know the thought for the day?"

"I am having some second thoughts for this day," Duffy said. He was amazed. People were dismantling and taking off the walls of all the buildings. The buildings, without the support of the walls, didn't seem to collapse one floor upon another, though some of them sagged a little.

"Faith maintains better than walls," a pious and bearded teenager said. "Walls were the enemy of freedom." Then he began to pull out his beard in big hunks.

People were dismantling and taking off their clothes. The people, without the support, didn't seem to collapse one section upon another, though some of them sagged a little.

"I know a green oasis," Melchisedech Duffy said. "I know a green oasis in this world of dusty insanity. I will go there."

*In turbulent world, one thing to bless:
Salvation as found at the Pelican Press.*

Melchisedech Duffy went over to the Pelican Press. It was only three blocks. In the Quarter, everything is only three blocks. It was still in the same old ratty building where he

had started it so many years ago, with Finnegan and Dotty Yekouris.

And the publishing schedule had never changed. On Monday the seamen's paper came out, on Tuesday the union sheet, on Wednesday the *Sporting News*, on Friday the jazz paper. The Bark was special; it was printed on Thursday or whenever. Sometimes it didn't even come out every week.

Today they should be printing *The Bark*, for it was Thursday. But was it? Was it indeed Thursday? Or was it the Great Day that breaks the sequence? *This is the Hero void of fame: This is the Day without a Name*, as the Great Day Rime had it: and the Great Day Rime was everywhere, tongueless, soundless, but hanging in the air.

Well, if it wasn't Thursday, then it was (Great Day or not) whenever; and *The Bark* still should be printing. Melchisedech went into the Pelican Press Building.

Mary Virginia Schaeffer was there, and Salvation Sally, and Margaret Stone. There was something quite revealing about them all.

"Oh, Duff," Mary Virginia cried. "Oh, I'm sorry. I haven't learned to get along without using names yet. You were right. You were right in every detail. I believe that you are the smartest man I know."

"Very likely, girl, very likely," Melchisedech said. "Perhaps you should broaden your acquaintance with us more intelligent types."

"Have some coffee, Duff. Isn't it, ah, interesting the way this day is turning out, and it hardly started yet?"

"Interesting, yes. Are you using cups?"

"I'm afraid so. We're old-fashioned. I imagine we'll get used to it by sunup. Margaret made an act of faith and we all had it going a while ago, drank it without cups. Then we got to laughing and we broke it. You can't laugh at the things of the Great Day. I burned myself when my coffee collapsed. I see that you did too. But Salvation Sally is drinking tea

without a cup. That filthy Aussie says that it's all right to laugh at coffee, but we must never laugh at tea."

Yes, Salvation Sally was drinking tea without a cup. She winked at Duffy, and when she winked she winked all the way down to her navel. How come he could see her navel anyhow? Had these fine ladies at the Pelican joined the commoners in this newness? Little Margaret Stone, with a big mallet, was breaking out all the walls of the building. It just didn't seem right to Melchisedech.

"You have to have walls," he protested. "You have to have walls to hang things on, if for nothing else."

"No, you don't," Margaret said, swinging energetically (she had always been strong as a little burro). "You are the one who explained how it would be in the first place. Don't you remember?"

"I was kidding when I wrote that."

"I'm not. If one has faith, then one doesn't need walls or any of such things. Oops! Lack of faith myself."

A large picture had fallen to the floor only a short while after the wall to which it had been fastened was demolished. It was one of those old, little-known masterpieces of Finnegan, his orange period. Margaret picked the picture up again, nailed it up on the empty air, and it stayed there. The nail going into the empty air sounded like a nail going into white pine.

But, yes, Margaret also had joined the commoners in one new fashion. However, she was at the moment pretty well clothed in dust, plaster, and sweat, from her hammering down the walls. She took out the studs violently with an axe. And now there was nothing at all supporting the room above them. It rocked like a boat, but it didn't fall down on them yet.

"Look, Duff," Mary Virginia said. "Oh, damn, there I go using names again. It's as though I didn't realize yet that there's no point where one person ends and another begins. But look at this old copy." She handed Melchisedech an old

copy of that wonderful magazine-journal named *The Bark* that was printed on these same premises. "It's amazing the way you predicted it all," she said, "how we would become uncontained, how we would live by faith and not by substance, how we would be completely emancipated, how we would merge with each other, how all walls and clothes and skins would be dismantled, how our minds would disappear (with faith, who needs minds?); you set it down in every detail, just a year ago. I feel that the people of the world are fulfilling the remainder of your details now."

She had handed him *The Bark* opened at the article "Great Day in the Morning" by Melchisedech Duffy. And Duffy's hands shook as he held it.

"But, Mary Virginia," he said, "this was a comic article, a bitterly comic article."

"Oh yes, that's the tragedy of it, from the old viewpoint. You put it so well in the final lines, 'If ever the world forgets to laugh, these things and others will come to pass.' How could you have known that it would forget? It's wonderful, isn't it? But when you're just coming into the thing, it sure is hard not to laugh at the way it's coming out. But to laugh is disastrous."

"Then let there be disaster!" Melchisedech thundered in not very convincing tones. "A disaster is surely better than what this day is turning into. Let the laughter of the Pelican People be the salvation of the world."

"No, no, never," Salvation Sally protested. "The only salvation here is myself. Salvation is in time, and we are beyond that. And laughter is simply not allowed. How lacking in faith would one have to be to laugh ever! Oh, take your clothes off, Duff, and at least one layer of skin. Join the thing. You invented the Day; and will you be the only one in the world too rigid to live in it?"

"Laughter was useful only in the transition period," Mary Virginia said. "Now that the Great Day is here, laughter would surely be a handicap, a blasphemy."

Melchisedech decided that things were going badly. The green oasis in the world of dusty insanity now proved to be of a very peculiar, almost sickly green.

"Are you printing *The Bark* today?" he asked. Could he somehow slip another article into it and undo the frightful good that he had done?

Whoosh! Margaret Stone pushed down another section of the outside wall, killing a little kid on the sidewalk. "Freedom, freedom!" she cried. And the Great-Day Freedom rushed in on them, and rushed out from them, and mingled.

"What do you mean, are we printing *The Bark* today?" Mary Virginia demanded. "You're not making sense, Duff—I mean you're not making sense, temporary and contingent person. There isn't any today. You wrote yourself that the Great Day can never be referred to as 'today,' since 'today' implies a sequence and—"

"Shut your Great Mouth this Great Day!" Melchisedech shouted with pinkish anger. It is hard to take serious a man who turns pink instead of purple with anger, but all things must be taken serious on the Great Day. The situation had certainly become serious with Melchisedech.

"Great Day to you, you filthy Irishman," Absalom Stein bellowed with a flourishing entrance. He could make a flourishing entrance even when there were no longer doors or walls to enter past.

"Small day to you, you filthy Jew," Melchisedech gave it back to him. Ah, this was one relationship as beautiful as it had ever been. Here, surely, was one friend remaining as an integral person, one acquaintance of kindred (if not quite equal) intelligence, one—

But Absalom was clothed only in billowing smoke and a reeking cigar. (He had left written orders that he be finally buried in a plain pine box and with a lighted cigar in his mouth. "How will you keep it lit, Absie?" Margaret Stone had asked him. "Never mind, I'll keep it lit," Stein had said, "I'll

never be too dead for that.") And the cigar, though lacking its outer wrapper leaf, held together and fumed prodigiously.

"Freedom, Faith, Great Day," Absalom said, and there was something uncontained about his eyes and manner. Melchisedech made one of Stein's own contempt-carrying gestures back at him, the one that said, without words, "Above the ears, nothing!" And Stein understood it not at all.

Why, Stein's brains were shot, gone completely! Stein had always had a lot of brains, but they had been of a volatile nature, quite near the surface, and now they had evaporated.

"I wonder whether you'll miss them, Absalom," Melchisedech said. "Your brains, I mean."

"No, I don't think so. Brains were useful only during the transition period. Now that the Great Day is here, they would probably prove a handicap. I've divested myself of mine, yes. I've divested myself of everything except the stogie. It will become my token and it will take the place of my name. Do you notice anything special about it?"

"That the longer you smoke it the longer it gets? Yes. You are all full of tricks this morning."

"Faith and Freedom, those are the things," Stein said. "This is the cigar made from faith-tobacco, not from physical tobacco. It is of the celestial tobacco foretold in scripture."

Stein had, in these latter years, become an obese man. When uncovered and uncontained, he became very much so. And he had always been a straight-faced kidder. But was he now? Could he be trusted? What is more noxious than a kidder gone serious? But he remained the distant possibility of hope.

"I suppose that we won't print any of the papers or magazines anymore," Mary Virginia was saying. (Of all of them she was the only one formly enough to go divested.) "Papers and magazines were useful only for the transition period. Now that the Great Day is here we should be doing

Great-Day stuff instead.”

“What would that be?” Melchisedech asked.

“Oh, sing songs without words, I guess. Finger-paint with faith-paint, not with physical paint. Be very close to each other. These are all forms of Great Day communication.”

Zabotski, well known in that neighborhood, probably stuck his head into the building. Probably, for it was hard to say just when a head was stuck into a building now that there were no walls or doors left.

“There's a fellow over on O'Dwyer Street who's already shed his skin completely,” he said. “Duff, why aren't you in the buff?”

“Clothed and in my right mind I'll remain,” Melchisedech said.

“Now, what were you jabbering, Zabotski?”

“A Great Day first: a fellow over on O'Dwyer Street has already shed his skin completely. That makes him the most emancipated man in town, possibly in the world.”

“Oh, we'll all be doing it before the day is over with,” Mary Virginia said.

“Except me,” Melchisedech challenged.

“Oh, I forgot, this Day isn't ever over with,” Mary Virginia corrected herself. “It is now Great Day forever, and yet we'll all be doing it soon. And when we are all skin-shed, then we'll be well on the way to true liberation. We'll be able to get so *close* to each other after we're skinless. Rubbing eyeballs with each other isn't in it for closeness anymore.”

“Some of the fellows are making their diaphragms disappear,” Stein said, “for greater visceral freedom.”

“That's nice,” Salvation Sally said.

This Zabotski, though bluff, was a good man. He had put up a big pot and a lot of money to keep the soup kitchen going through the years. And, providentially, he still had a big pot and a lot of money left. His appearance brought a question out of Melchisedech's gorge:

"The soup kitchen, is it still operating today? Is the big pot still boiling, the pot that never ceases to boil?" The soup kitchen and the flophouse for the poor were adjacent to the Pelican Press.

"The big pot is still boiling," Margaret Stone said. "It is boiling with faith-soup now. There's no need to put anything physical into it."

"Is this thing worldwide?" Melchisedech asked them. He had invented the Day, and he knew less about it than any of them.

"Of course it is worldwide," Stein said. "From the East even unto the West and all that. And, of course, we have no old-style communication with the rest of the world on the subject. Electronic and mechanical communications aren't being used. Why should they be? Faith and Freedom and Sense of Community have arrived, and nothing else is needed."

"Ah me," Melchisedech said. "I had always regarded the Pelican as a refuge, as an anchor to hold fast in the great storms of the world."

"Both the sea ships and the river boats are cutting loose their anchors and letting them sink forever," Zabotski said. "With faith, who needs anchors?"

"You have failed me, all of you," Melchisedech said. "You are the lump and not the leaven. You are as the world, worldly, but with none of the redeeming quality of solid black earth. But I know a greener oasis and a more unfailing fountain. I leave you."

"Good-by, Duff, I mean good-by, person," Mary Virginia said.

"And *do* take your clothes off, please," Salvation Sally said.

"Why do you always want to be conspicuous?"

Melchisedech Duffy left the Pelican. If this was indeed the Great Day, then he left it forever.

*This is the Michael making moan
With stony tears and a sword of stone.*

Melchisedech walked over to St. Michael's. A bare yellow sliver of sun was showing at the end of one street.

"Ah, you crooked, cranky thing," Melchisedech told it, "I'll trap you now. Move once and I'll have you."

But the sun did not move. It would not move while anyone was watching. If it could be seen to move, then time was still running; and that would be a contradiction on the Great Day. The Great Day, if this was it, must remain forever dawning.

Melchisedech looked away a bit to test it. When he looked back, the sun had moved, but only to make itself more comfortable, to get a better hold on its dawning. Now it would move no more.

St. Michael's was being unstructured by various people. They were using faith rather than hammers and rams, but they had brought most of the building down. The building had contained something, so it was said, and that was disapproved. Melchisedech stopped to talk to the stone statue of St. Michael in what had been the entry.

"It's a sad day, Mike," he said. "If an oasis cannot be found here, then it can be found nowhere."

"It's a sad day," Michael agreed. "And the living water has gone out from this place. You'll find no oasis here." Michael had had an eye gouged out, by hammer and chisel it seemed, perhaps faith-hammer and chisel, perhaps real.

"Look, mama," a little girl was saying somewhere. "There's the crazy old man who talks to statues."

"Shh, don't look at him," the mother said. "It isn't nice to look. He's wearing clothes."

"Will there be mass this morning, Mike?" Melchisedech asked.

"There won't even be any this morning," the statue said sadly. "This Great-Day business has bitten the whole world."

Ah, Duff, if there were only some way to put a good edge on a marble sword, then I'd have at them. They are unstructuring the church and they have put up the twelve signs of the zodiac and the sun and the moon in place of the stations of the cross. But the Unfaithful Assembled will not notice any difference at all in the services, they have gone so weird for such a long while."

The holy figure of the demiurge Teilhard had come down on the altar. With him appeared McLuhan on his right hand and McGonigal on his left. They were transfigured with light.

"Lord, it is good that we be here," the Unfaithful Assembled intoned. "Great Day."

"Peduncle, peduncle, Point Edhead, cosmogenization, valorization, obfuscation. Great Day," the holy demiurge blessed them.

"Lord, let us build three tents here," the Unfaithful Assembled intoned. "Great Day."

"Peduncle, neo-anthropocentrism, corpusculization, nookonos, peduncle. Great Day," the holy demiurge blessed again.

"Kind of gets you, doesn't it, Duff?" Michael said. "What am I saying? Well, it would kind of get me if I weren't Michael. Ah, I wish there was some way to put a good double edge on a stone sword. If you run onto a good blade man, send him by. I'll have me a cutting and flaming sword yet. Who's going to know that I'm an archangel when I'm here with the toes broken off me and one eye gouged out and only a dull stone sword in my hand?"

"If I run onto a good blade man I'll send him by," Melchisedech said. He left Michael there crying stone tears.

"Well, I bet I know an oasis that is wet if nothing else," Melchisedech said. He left St. Michael's and headed for the Stumble-Bum Royal Rendezvous and Oyster Bar. Young fellows tried to pull his beard off as he walked through the

streets, and they did pull out some bloody gouts of it. He noticed that most of the beards had been shed, both of the teenagers and of the few grown men who had sported them. They were shed by acts of faith. If one has faith, what does he need with a beard? The beards of most of the folks had come off easily. An easy breeze was now blowing remaining beard-patches off various faces. Soon it would be a barefaced world.

Young ladies tried to pull his clothes off as he walked through the streets, and they did pull some ripped strips of them off. "Be free, be unenclosed, be emancipated, be unstructured," they all insisted to him. "Is there anything dirtier than a dirty old man with clothes on?"

"A sazarac," Melchisedech ordered as he entered the Stumble-Bum. He felt the looks at him like those manifold whips with little tearing hooks at the end of the lashes. The barkeep shook his head. "A salty dog, then," Melchisedech said, and he felt the hatred rising against him. "An old fashioned," Melchisedech said. He should never have said that.

"Get this nut," the barkeep said, hooking a sneering thumb toward Melchisedech, and the grumbling hatred rose against this nonconformist who refused to be free. "We haven't had any of those drinks since yesterday."

"What do you have to drink, then?" Melchisedech asked humbly.

"The New Day Dawner. That's what everyone drinks. Who would want anything else?"

Melchisedech left the Stumble-Bum. There were no wet oases, no green oases, no unfailing fountains anywhere.

*This is the drink that nothing slakes:
This is the dream whence none awakes.*

Melchisedech experimented a bit. He had noticed people, here and there, walking through visible walls as easily as if

they were not there.

"Why, then they are not there," Melchisedech said. "The people have removed them by faith, and they are visible only to my faithless eyes. Let me see whether I can walk through those walls also."

But he could not. He bruised and bloodied himself, but he could not go through this sort of walls as other people could.

"Then part of this wall-demolishing is a subjective thing," he said. "But I am outnumbered. Many persons pass through, and I do not. It must be my own subjective that is awry."

The sun was still in the process of dawning, but it had not moved at all since it was last viewed. There was not a lot of movement of any sort on the Great Day. The real action was hidden, and yet almost everything had all the wraps off it.

But the people were all interiorizing themselves. Some skinless, some only part so, they looked blank, blank in every part of them. And they were merging. They were coming together witlessly, blankly, spherically. Dozens of them had now formed into great balls all together. These rolled, and they merged with other great balls of people-substance. Soon all the people in the whole city would be coalesced into one big fleshy sphere, communicating and interiorizing like anything.

Then the peoples of all the world would somehow roll together and become one thing, although the mechanics of this were far from clear.

"Everybody will have joined it except myself," Melchisedech said, "and I invented it in a time of cranky humor. Should I stand proud apart then? But how can one stand proud with no one to stand before?"

Subjectively, quite a while went by, but the sun did not move. Melchisedech walked himself weary, and then sat on a bench in Jackson Square. Most of the buildings of the city had disappeared now. That business of them standing after

their walls and supports had been removed was only a transition thing.

"This is only a nightmare," Melchisedech said. "I am sleeping, and this is not one of my better dreams. Now I must make a great effort to wake up."

"You can't," Morpheus said. "You will have to change your whole idea about sleeping. More important, you will have to change your whole idea about waking up. Both are illusions."

"Anyone can be a showboat in his own field of study," Melchisedech said. "You are the god of sleep, so you have the advantage over me in the discussion."

"Everyone is the god of something," Morpheus said. "You did not know that? But I have broader interests than most. 'Morpheus' ('sleep') and 'Morphē' ('shape') are really the same word, and shape is known only in sleep. A waking world would be a shapeless and formless monstrosity."

"I'll take that chance. Help me to wake up."

"Absolutely not. There is no longer any such thing as waking up."

"Where did I go wrong?" Melchisedech asked the empty ears of misty Morpheus. "Why am I alone unamalgamated in this thing?"

"Where did you go wrong, where did you go right? It was in being too stiff to change. You allowed yourself to become an old wineskin," Morpheus said.

("Neither do men put new wine into old bottles," Matthew said. "If they do, the skins burst and the wine runs out. See me, 9:17.")

"No man, having drunk old wine, straightway desires new, for he says, 'The old is better,' " Luke said. "See me, 5:39."

"You evangelists go settle it among yourself," Melchisedech told them, "with eight-ounce gloves." The evangelists went away.)

"Now tell me true, Morph, am I awake or not?" Melchisedech asked the sleep god.

"No, you are not awake and you are not. You can never wake up, for waking up is one of the options that have now disappeared from the world. And you cannot really sleep. You can only dream a diminishing dream in a state of half-sleep. It all closes up on itself. It goes out of business."

"Is the whole world only my dream, Morph?" Melchisedech asked.

"Yours or mine, Duff. We seem to be the only two left. We'll end as two submicroscopic snakes, the only remaining things in the worlds, and then one of us must swallow the other."

"I'll not like that. There must be more than that."

"No. The whole thousand-times-mega cosmos began as one single-celled creature. Then he had the notion that there were two of him, and this notion was the beginning of his dreaming. He dreamed the whole multiplex thing that has seemed to be the worlds. The dream grew for long eons, but now it shrinks back again to its beginning. There is still one single cell left, dreaming a diminishing dream."

"So let it be," Melchisedech said, "so long as I am that single cell."

"Or I," said Morpheus, "but there is still only one. I'll wrestle you for the illusion."

They wrestled. But Morpheus was one of those timeless, ever-young Greek gods, and cosmic wrestling is their game. Moreover, they smear themselves completely with a numinous grease that makes them very hard to get hold of.

There came over Melchisedech the panic of extinction. The old-fashioned fear of damnation isn't even in the same league with it. The lungs pop like toy balloons, the kidneys melt like wax, the heart bursts like a cherry bomb. Melchisedech collapsed on himself and became smaller by a million orders, and Morpheus followed him down. They were

a single-celled creature swallowing itself. Melchisedech screamed as loudly as a single-celled creature can scream in a void, after he's swallowed himself.

"It's the end," he gasped.

"No, it's the beginning," Morpheus gurgled in his swallowed state. "We've been here before."

A hint as to a possible alternate outcome had been given in an article in the magazine-journal *The Bark* one year before. But how is a single-celled creature that has just swallowed itself going to have access to back issues of obscure magazines?

There are a few Great Day verses left over, and the world affair cannot be concluded until they are disposed of. There are also, unaccountably, about the same number of persons left over, and they must also be disposed of.

If each person will come forward and proclaim loudly one of the verses, then both that person and that verse can be forever obliterated. Try it. Lose yourself in it.

This is the meadow that has no grass.

This is the wine without a glass.

This is the building lacking walls.

This is the murder that none appalls.

This is the hero void of fame.

This is the Day without a name.

This is the move without a mean.

This is the sun less shine and sheen.

This is the wineskin Matthew told.

This is the old skin-bottle, old.

Here is the crowd that lurks alone.

Here is the grave without a stone.

There, it worked, didn't it? Got rid of everything.

The Casey Machine

There's a way, my companion, my bacon my bean,
No matter at bottom it isn't too clean:
The way is the way of the Casey Machine.

— *Promontory Goats*

A top electronics repairman and designer like myself, Newton Prescott, has the opportunity of knowing more of what is going on in the world than any other person. He not only has his finger on the world's pulse: he designs that pulse, and he redesigns it every day. And ninety-eight percent of that pulse is subliminal and deep-flowing.

I am writing this journal as therapy. I have a compulsion to forget some things (neither I nor my doctor understands this compulsion) and at the same time something jogs my memory back to them. I am advised to write them out in this journal and then burn the journal. If that doesn't work, I will have to have brain surgery. Something is bugging me in a small area of my brain.

A while back, every coin parlor on Kasmir Street had at least one of the Casey Machines. That was an electronic device of such scope as you don't see every day. Most of the Tea Rooms on Hubbard Street had them; and the more modish and vital bars on North Durkheim Street. The Casey Machines were Achronological Eaves-Dropping Machines.

"They were unspeakably vile," Mrs. Duckhunter said. "I don't want either of you to have anything more to do with them even if they come back."

"They were gold mines," Mr. Duckhunter said, "and you, Prescott," (he said to me) "were as good a shovel-and-crib man as was ever around a primitive gold mine. There was a

million dollars here, or ten million, for the right hook-up. Sure it was vile, at first. But if you can't stop a thing from being vile, you can at least make money out of it. It's an idea whose time was overdue. The need was there. I don't remember it very well now, but we did make money out of it, and we're still doing it, beneath the surface. None of it is as clear as it was, but we're still making millions and millions and millions out of something."

"I wish we weren't," Mrs. Duckhunter said. "We aren't bad people. We aren't really vile. Why isn't there some way we can shut off the money and be poor and honest again?"

"We weren't ever poor, Crissie," her husband George Duckhunter said, "and we weren't ever honest, for that matter. And I don't know any way to shut off the money. We're being paid as high priced guardians, or some such. I just don't remember the circumstances as well as I might. I don't believe that either you or Prescott does either. We can't exactly keep our memories of those wonderful and event-filled days when we were so rich. We have to settle for remaining so rich."

There had been quite a bit of discussion about that strange device, the Casey Machine, that so many persons (including its purported inventor) insisted did not exist at all. And much of the discussion was on the theological level.

"Will everybody know everything, or will only the people who are 'saved' know everything?" a soggy sinner asked his pastor. "After the Judgment, whether the General or the Particular, will all of us know everything that ever happened? Will all of us know all the dirt, all the thoughts and acts of every person who ever lived? Will we be roomy enough for all this knowledge? Will we have the scope to possess it in vivid detail? Will we be able to revel in all the acts of our neighbors forever?"

"All persons will know everything, yes," the pastor said. "Whether it is after the Particular or the General Judgment

that we receive full knowledge is uncertain: but that may not matter, and there may not be any great interval between the two. When we die we enter eternity, and there is no time differential there. The 'Saved' will have edification and joy from their total knowledge, and the damned will have fiery regret and deepest suffering. But as to the reveling in the shameful thoughts and actions of other persons, no, the 'Saved' would never do that."

"The 'Saved' will miss all the fun then," the soggy sinner said. "But there will be recompenses to being damned. Ah, will there ever be recompenses! And we can have that revel-and-glow show for times without end. There is no way we can lose."

"You can lose your eternal souls!"

"So to speak, pastor, so to speak. But they will still be eternal, and we can still be doing what we like best to do anyhow. We will have the time beyond time, and all the time there is. And we will have the dirt beyond dirt and all the dirt that has ever been, or is, or will be. Oh, it will be a wallow-and-revel-and-gloat experience forever, and there will be no limit to it. The Casey Machine is a foretaste of the glory that is to come. And the 'lost' souls will have a lot more fun out of it than will the 'found' or 'saved' souls."

"But you will suffer forever the discomforts of the damned, Lorenzo—" the pastor protested in fear and amazement.

"Discomfort forever will be worth it!" the sinner said resoundingly. "There are priorities in every condition, and I give first priority to prowling all that secret knowledge in a pulsating glow. And until I cross the bar and come to the untrammelled thing, I will use the Casey Machine for all it's worth."

"The better sort of people are not having much to do with the Casey Machine," the pastor said.

"So much the worst for the better sort of people!" the soggy sinner gave the decision.

And there was a conversation between a daughter and her mother.

"It is not right that we should seek out and revel in the dirt of each other," the daughter said. "It is more the case that we should share the total lives of each other, in pathos and in hilarity, in love and in fascination. With everything to select from, we will naturally select the best."

"Nah, no such thing," the mother answered. "That's not for me. It's not for hardly any one. For most of us, we will want the outright filth and the outrageous dirt. There will be some humor in it, yes, very dirty humor. And there will also be cannibalism and sadism and satanism.Â But the main jolt will always be the dirt, and the scandal, and the sedition and slander and blackmailing knowledge. Not money blackmail: personal ruination blackmail. And the dirt, the dirt, the dirt."

I am about the only one left who can go back and pick up such private conversations from the recent past.

Why do we, in swift moments, remember when we could fly or do other wonderful things? Because, in swift moments, at some time or other, we really *could* fly and do other wonderful things. And because it is not good that we should be above our heads for too long, those swift moments were brief ones and were quickly forgotten.

"Oh salving hatred, Oh revivifying derision, Oh nourishing slander!" Josephine McSorely crowed in the Underground Eagle. It is significant that my own copy of it seems to be the only copy still left in existence, even though the Underground Eagle always had a large press run.

"The secret is out," Josephine wrote, "and it can never be penned in again. It was at a small and informal meeting tonight that the make-ups and premises of the world were changed. We held a Particular Judgment, and the Casey Machine was born from that judgment. It is here, right now, and forever. We all know everything now. The power and the

knowledge came over the small group of us, and we can perhaps pass it on to other groups for a fee.

“In times before this, several other organizations of illuminated persons have known everything. They knew everything, before their own deaths, by making a Particular Judgment in their own lives. But we become masters of our own judgment in a way the earlier ones could not, because we live in an age of electronic amplification and switching and data control. We are able to project it all, and to repeat it. Yes, and we are able to sell it.

“Casey, with his peculiar mind-set, was the activator of this. He himself denies that the Casey Machine has been invented. Well, it *was* invented, by the ideologues and experts among us. And it *is* known as the Casey Machine. And the world is not the same as it seemed to be before we invented it. (Casey himself never was the same as he seemed to be.) This is the big night. This is the night that slimy and rotten enjoyment came into the world as a maneuverable thing.

“Casey had a passion for knowing everything about everyone, even and especially the most sordid things. He had this passion so strongly that he was able to modify and change the way of the world with it.

“This is all nonsense,” Casey said. ‘What is the matter with the bunch of you anyhow?’ ‘Supposing that it *is* nonsense,’ that electronics man Newton Prescott said. ‘Nonsense is more often amplified than is sense. It is stronger in its accumulation, and it is less subject to blocking out and monitoring out. You have provided the impetus, Casey, one strong enough to affect the world and turn death into a trifle. It can ride on any carrier, and I believe the carrier of the world magnetism will be the best. It will not be the strangest thing riding that power. Yes, Casey, the Casey Machine *has* been invented, by you and by me and by others of us here.’

“ ‘Where is it then?’ Casey asked. ‘I can't see it. Can you?’ ‘Yes,’ Newton Prescott said, ‘in my mind I see it, and it will operate mostly inside minds. It is a wireless machine as of now. And it has no physical components yet. But we will give it components and materiality.’ ‘If I gave impetus to such a thing, then I withdraw that impetus,’ Casey said. ‘You can't,’ Prescott told him. ‘This wind has blown from you, and there is no way you can make it not to have blown. By the way, I have an interesting idea for one component of the Casey Machine. There is an electrical discharge from dead persons that is generally overlooked for the reason that it occurs about thirty minutes after clinical death. But we have trapped more than two hundred instances of this discharge into condensers, and we have studied the data. It is very intricate. (We have lately discovered that electricity, like magnetism, is made up of a variety of unaccountable foreign material; there is no such thing as pure electricity: it has to be made out of something.) This post-death discharge data is of a two-way effect: part of it comes from the other side of death and was never in the living person. I am certain that this is a real kick-back from what used to be called the ‘other shore’. I intend to use one such ‘dead-man’ charge in every Casey Machine that is made.’

“Then Newton Prescott said several other things too weird to print even in the Underground Eagle. And Casey washed his hands and conscience of the whole affair, again and again. ‘Casey, you are a hypocrite,’ said Januarius O'Higgins, who was present. ‘I predict that you yourself will buy a Casey Machine, probably through a middle-man, as soon as they are available.’ ‘May I go to Hell if I do,’ Casey swore. ‘Oh, all of us will go to Hell,’ said Evelyn Apostolo. ‘We'll ultimately get more out of the machine, and out of the phenomenon of which it is the forerunner, by going to Hell. We have made that choice: it was the choice embodied in the Particular Judgment that we gave and received this

evening, the Judgment that created the Casey Machine as a side effect.'

—Josephine McSorely, with her Underground News in the *Underground Eagle*

Is it not most peculiar that I own the only known copy of this issue of the Underground Eagle? Isn't it funny that nobody else remembers the piece at all, not even Josephine McSorely who wrote it? And my copy is falling apart. In fact, the date of the issue has flaked off of every single sheet of this issue.

Ah, we did make a lot of money out of the Casey Machines! It was as easy as stealing immortal souls from little kids. We were making a million dollars every — well, there is just no time interval to express how often we were making a million dollars. The Casey Machine was an achronological (non-time-bound) device, and the harvest from it was in one huge continuing minute. We were continually making a million, and millions. A dozen of us became Instant Big Rich.

We did not really make all that many of the actual and material Casey Machines. But people came to us with wads of money and said they had been receiving vivid life broadcasts from our machines, and they wanted at all costs to continue to receive them. Well, maybe our machines were broadcasting, if people said that they were; but they weren't designed to broadcast. And people were paying us large sums for franchises. "We don't want to be cut off," they would say. And others would approach us with "We don't want the machine, but we want the name and the power of the machine. We want to call ours the Casey Machine also, though they will be raunchier than your originals." And Casey Machine Clubs paid us area fees. The money came in variously. Well, it was part of the mechanism that it should make a lot of money for us; and it did, even before we went federal.

The machines weren't designed to broadcast. They weren't designed at all. They grew out of the immaterial components of Casey's passionate and invading curiosity of the thoughts and acts of other people. They grew out of my own discovery of the double-world kick-back electrical discharge mechanism which did indeed serve as a door and valve between worlds. And it grew out of the verve and opportunism of Josephine McSorely, Januarius O'Higgins, Evelyn Apostolo, George and Crissie Duckhunter, and others who promoted the idea which convinces people that they did indeed want something that they already knew that they wanted furiously. It isn't difficult to lead thirst-maddened horses to water. And all of these colleagues had good ideas.

"Give us a classy chassis like a next-year's Ford Alexandrine." "Invent new colors for it, new reds and flesh colors and blacks, lurid colors. Luridity is the thing." "Shoot it full of intensity and ur-lust. Make it primordial." I received such advice from them, and it was all good. "Use grabby motifs, grabby!"

Yeah, one grabby motif I used was the eyes. I was already using a dead-man delayed electrical discharge quantum in every machine. It wasn't necessary. I could have used a dozen other methods; but this was effective, available, quite easy to employ; and it gave an aura of authenticity to the whole thing. Now I also put a set of dead-man's eyes on every machine. It's even easier to procure eyes than delayed electrical discharges, and there was a good-for-business spookiness in having the customers hooked up so that they could look through authentic dead-man's eyes into the revelations.

And the mania took over.

It would seem that persons could simply suicide and have the same effect all at once without the expense. But there was something too final about that for many persons. They would do that the last thing, and it didn't matter that they

paid out all their substance on the Casey Machines first. "This is to have the best of all three worlds," one enthusiast said.

The matter of the Casey Machines was raunchy, and some of those of our licensed competitors were stronger than those we made ourselves. This was the primordial lust of mind and body and soul, and of all the under-minds and over-minds. This was the 'enjoyable degradation', the 'polite rottenness', the 'healthy prurience'. There was almost endless variety in it. Persons rose to high performance on it when they knew that they were on show, even persons dead for thousands of years. There were probably a million of these very conspicuous 'show boats' of the past and the present who were zeroed in on. Their names and identifications spread by word of mind, for they were really top performers. People under the Casey Influence had an other world power and scope of keeping millions of individual persons in their mind and of enjoying billions and billions and billions of details.

I myself was not so entirely fascinated by all the things that the people did as I was fascinated by the electronic manner of their doing. I had recently discovered that there were three categories of being and action, the rational, the irrational, and the electronic; and that the electronic was the most powerful and the most varied. The material world was almost entirely electronic, and it was made up of alien particles and forces and fields. The most familiar and accepted thing, when broken down, was found to be an electronic weave of strands that were neither familiar nor accepted, but were foreign and strange.

Because of group feedback I was thinking better than I ever had in my life. Merely as fall-out from the titanic loutishness and lust and sedition and gluttony and slander of the people, this had become breakthrough day in the idea area. There was a new and steeper mentality paralleling the new

incredible coarseness. All of us top electronics experts could now read each others' minds. There was some anger and jealousy about this, but really it was to the advantage of all of us.

In fact, every person in the world could now read the mind of every other person in the world, or they would be able to do so as soon as they realized what new-power field they were in. This was not exactly as a result of the Casey Machine. It was part of the misnamed 'Casey Condition' which had now imposed itself on the world.

Many of us reveled in knowledge, as many more were reveling in the *pornea* of lust and soul-nakedness and everted bodies and minds. The Casey Condition was very big. Every person could read the mind and body, and the deepest unconsciousness and memory and subliminal areas, of all persons living and dead: aye, and also of all persons still unborn and unconceived and un-thought of; for all time was now simultaneous to us in our new condition. And we were all the same animal. This power of total reading had been available all along. It was just that for several of the recent millennia we had forgotten to use it.

The earth magnetism is not self contained, I discovered. That is, we of the higher electronic community of minds discovered it. It represents a bond between the Earth and something else not yet identified, something more than our solar system and something more than generalized space. But the strands of this braided force are helices of buried memories and buried mysteries. They are the remnants of what must have been really stupendous moments and historical movements subsumed into the Earth's magnetism: and into its thermodynamic balance, and into its isostasis, and into its gravity which is itself a large collection of forces.

"Old dogs, lying in the sun, are one form of history," Pomodorus wrote.

Old residual magnetism, lying in the Earth, is another form.



Question 382: In what state will the bodies of the just arise?

The bodies of the just will rise glorious and immortal.

Glorious means? Our body will be shining like the sun, swift as thought, as capable of penetrating matter, be most beautiful, and be without pain or change.

Immortal means? Our bodies will never die after the resurrection.

Question 383: Will the bodies of the damned also rise?

The bodies of the damned will also rise, but they will be condemned to eternal punishment.

—the Baltimore Catechism.

I have become fascinated by all aspects of bodies, our own undead bodies, our own dead bodies, our own resurrected bodies. Just as a special mental power has been available to us all along, had we not forgotten to use it, so a special body splendor is ours whenever we require it in order to make splendid moves. How did we ever happen to forget how wonderful we are?

Yes, in our own great and shining moment, our bodies shine as with a sun within them. They are as swift as thought, for they are the bright depositories of all swift thought. Our bodies can penetrate matter as thought does. They can be most beautiful. Whether they can be so splendid and superior all the time I don't know; but apparently they can penetrate all time from their eternal moment.

Still quite early in this moment there had been a change of emphasis. Or should I say 'Still quite early in this day there has been a change of emphasis!'? I suppose that I use 'day' as Scripture sometimes uses it. There are the days that

go by, and there is the Day that abides. Many days go by, but the whole 'Casey Condition' occurs in a single day, in a single moment really.

Still quite early in this moment there had been a change of emphasis. In my own murky heart, I had assumed, along with the soggy sinner in one of the dialogues I have given, that the 'lost' souls could have more fun out of it than could the 'found' or 'saved' souls, that the main jolt would be the dirt and the scandal and the sedition and the slander, and the blackmailing knowledge; and that these things would sell the Machines and set the Conditions.

(The 'Machines' were porno shrines: they weren't really needed, except for the true believers in holy porn.)

But quite early in the day this prevailing view was disputed.

"We will take our chances in this world, and in every world! Let the grace flow! Write down our names! We enter the lists!" some hundreds of persons spoke for some millions. "There will be more Good Will than Bad Will, else has the world been in vain. And it has not been in vain."

Now here was a real apple-knocker that nobody in my crowd had foreseen! There *were* alternatives to the 'enjoyable degradation', to the 'polite rottenness', to the 'healthy prurience'. There was a live possibility of things that were outside of the wallow-and-revel-and-gloat experience and goal. When everyone knew all about everyone, not everyone chortled and gluttonized and fed on the worst.

Some persons found that the more fully they knew other people the more they liked them.

There was something suspect to me about the Moment. I did not suspect its power or scope. I suspected its permanence.

Oh yes, the moment would last forever, as every true Moment must. But we would not stand in the Moment forever. We would probably stand out of it, and in it, and out

of it again several times. I had the feeling that we would stand out of it again, for a while, in the very near future.

I saw the fiery message in the bush. I saw the sign in the sky.

I saw the handwriting on the wall, in rather archaic Babylonian or Chaldee.

So I took two precautions against the coming time when we would stand out of the moment again.

I went to see about Continuous-Flow Federal Funding.

And I had a 'Remember It' memory jog capsule inset into my own brain. The capsule was tuned to retain the whole idea of the Casey Machine. But why did I believe that was necessary? Who could possibly forget the Casey Machine?

Oh, I'd made a study of this business of forgetting eleven-day wonders. I can recognize the accumulations of forgotten fossils of such fads, but I can seldom interpret those fossils. A minority of the vanished eleven-day wonders is still in popular memory with a nostalgic or humorous handle on them; but even these which are so enshrined in toy shrines are mostly misremembered and misunderstood. And others of the chronic occurrences, and among them there may be some of the most massive and influential, are forgotten completely. A few of the deeply forgotten ones we can pick up with the Casey Machine or the Casey Condition, but we must have at least some slight whisper of an idea of what we want to pick up.

I wanted to remember the Casey Machine and the Casey Condition. I had no reason to believe that they would be forgotten, but I had an intuition and apprehension that they might be.

So I went to see about Continuous-Flow Federal Funding, about Compensatory Counter-Flow Payments, about Impacted Entertainment Area Federal Funding. The argument was that the Casey Machine, since payment was required for its use, was more available to the rich than to the poor. This situation should be corrected by Counterpart

Funds of both the Current and the Future Contingency sort. I also got the concession that the site of every Casey Machine should be declared a shrine, with Perpetual Care to be provided by means of Perpetual Guardian Payments to be made to a responsible group — our own.

And we got the guarantees, in several sorts of payments, to be in perpetuity. And several of them were real whoppers. It's all in knowing how to ask for things, and in striking while the Casey Machine is hot.

And I had the 'Remember It' memory jog installed in my brain. In the extreme case of specific and directed amnesia, I might forget the Casey Machine along with every one else. But I'd still come closer to remembering it than anyone else would.



"I want to know when it was last on the *house*.
I want to know which has the heart of a *louse*.
I want to know who has been milking my *cowse*."

— Promontory Goats

The Wiper comes by and wipes out part of the memories. Then he comes by again and wipes out more of them. And who is the Wiper?

He is a cloud-high giant. He comes with a rag and wipes out part of a cloud. And when he does that, he wipes out part of a thing in people's heads too. A little boy told me that today, and I'm sure he had a good intuitive understanding of the Wiper-Person.

And since the boy told me that, I have seen several good pictures of the Wiper drawn on walls and sidewalks.

Oh sure, it worked.

Only to the superficial is it irrational that we should know much more after we are dead than we do while we are alive; or that we should know much more when we are in a moment than when we are not in it. I will only say that every Casey Machine had somehow the essence of a dead person in it. In this great increase of knowledge, a lifetime of preparation is translated and traded for a moment of intense possession; and, by the technicality of it being on the far side of time, that moment of possession is forever. But we set it up on the near side of time. We set up the links, and it worked.

What possibilities that does open out, if only they were explored!

Oh, they were explored all right. And now those possibilities and explorations are on the boneyard with other obsolete eleven day wonders.

Oh sure, it busted. What busted?

The strained case of an achronological device applied to working chronicity. That busted. It's been gone for a while now. No use crying over spilled temporalities.

I fail to see how even the worst storms on Venus can be held responsible for it. Sunspots could have done it, of course. But if you blame everything on sunspots, that's like one person playing a four handed game by himself.

The mania hadn't taken up much real time. That is why it was so easily erased and forgotten. It moved into the abiding moment. Then it moved out of it again, and it was gathered to its fathers. Its fathers were the earth forces, magnetism and isostases and geothermal accretions that make up the matrix into which all eleven day wonders are subsumed.

The earth-forces are made up of very many such-gatherings-in or subsumptions, and of very little other basic flux. I believe that worlds that have not subsumed such emotional content or happening will have very little magnetism or corona or foinse.

The Casey Machine, being an achronological device, may indeed *have happened*. Only not yet.

The *what* machine being a *what*?

There is a feeling that things had been rather underdone for a while. Death had become (or may become) so minor an event that no one paid much attention to it. And then the condition moved. It did not move to take the place and importance that it had held before the bothering. It moved to another and different place and importance.

Something was subsumed into the earth forces. That is like one more limey and crunchy marine skeleton being subsumed into the floor of the ocean.

Item: I bet I went to that well longer than anyone else did. I bet I still go sometimes.

Item: I still have more money flowing in than any one else has. And I partly remember what it's for.

I have had a small electro-mechanical device removed from my brain. I don't know how it got there or what it was for.

This is a strange journal that I have started to write in again as part of my therapy. But the words in most of it are utterly incomprehensible to me.

I have a feeling of many strangers whom I once knew very well, and who once knew me very well. And sometimes they approach me.

"I miss you and Regina so much," a dumpy lady said to me only this morning. "I enjoyed it a lot, the way I had the feel of you and everything you'd do. I'd catch you sometimes just before I got up in the morning." Strange!

And a man said to me, just last week, or just this week: "There was never a mind I enjoyed so much as yours. At night sometimes I used to light my pipe and take off my shoes and just listen to the things you were thinking. It was a pleasure." Strange, most strange!

Certain standing moments of realization are interposed through history. And then they are forgotten by fiat. But the buried memory of them sustains us and fills us with promise.

I like as much as I can remember of it. And something similar will move into the moment again in another aeon or so.

I still go to that well a lot. But the bucket I dip with is different from the one I used to use. And there are still the Federal Funds forever.



Addenda

I'm grisly ghost with orange gloves.
I'm other things around the edges.
I seek for valid lives and loves.
I teeter on ungodly ledges.

— *Electronic Elegies*
Newton Prescott

Who am I try to kid? I'm trying to kid myself, Newton Prescott. But to the best of belief, there is no such person as Newton Prescott. He is (I am) only a minor aspect of Casey Szymansky. I watched as my orange gloved hand wrote the above verses; but it wrote them in Casey's handwriting, not in my own. Yes, sometimes I'm permitted a handwriting of my own. The morning paper hasn't arrived yet, so I don't know what year this is. So I don't know whether Casey is supposed to be alive or dead.

It was all reasonably simple when it began. I (whether or not I was an independent person or an aspect of Casey) devised the Casey Machine. It was simply a wireless audio-machine (with video variations) that transmitted unspeakably vile stuff for unspeakably vile subscribers. We selected unspeakably wealthy subscribers (Chicago was then full of them), shot a highly sophisticated dart into the head of each of them, and so hooked most of them. We collected. And when they objected to paying, we cut them off or threatened to cut them off. Most of them couldn't abide being cut off from the hellish thing so they caved in. But somehow very high federal investigators confronted Casey with their evidence and their suspicions. But Casey rises to great heights when confronted with anything. People and institutions confront Casey at their peril. The Federals set up a giant foundation to fund the Casey Machine forever, whether or not it was in physical existence. The Federals were lucky to get out of it so easy. They were hooked by Hell, but Casey always swore that he had nothing to do with anything hellish.

The morning paper has arrived. With trepidation I look at the year of its date. The year may vary as much as three decades in one week, back to before I ever heard of Casey, to a fearfully late year as on today's paper. This means that Casey has been dead for several years, and that I am a ghost, or may be something less.

"Oh, you were always a ghost," Casey told me brutally once. "I had one splinter of my personality that I decided to give a ghostly body and an inane name to. And the most inane name I could think of was Newton Prescott. You will move back and forth through time as I will, Newton, and you will still be ghost here after I am gone from this world. You will be eyes and ears for me here."

"You are hellish, Casey. I want out."

"You are only a minor quirk of me, Newton," he said, "and there is no 'out' for a minor quirk."

But Casey always swore that he had nothing to do with anything hellish. Once, before a dozen or so of us, two or three of us being only aspects of Casey, but others valid persons, Casey brought out a brim-full basin and washed his hands dramatically.

"God over my head," he swore, "I am guiltless of anything hellish. By the brightness of this water, I wash my hands from any evil or any traffic with ungodly devices." And he washed his hands, and they were unaccountably clean.

"But it isn't bright water. The basin is full of blood!" I protested, but nobody seemed to hear me. Often, people do not seem to hear me.

Well, Casey's hands were clean. But mine (My God, how was that?) were slippery with dark visceral blood that would never come off me. Oh, it was simple enough. He transferred his hellishness from his main person to a minor splinter of his personality, me. He fooled everybody with the trick. Did he fool God also? So far as I can tell, he did.

I got me a dozen expensive pair of beautiful suede white gloves. I wear them always. But they are not white when I wear them. They are always a tolerable orange color. Well, I can live (live?) with that. I have to.

The rental lady just came in with a medium young couple and began to show them my apartment. They did not seem to see me. It is a very nice apartment, and she offered it to them at a foolishly low price.

"It's wonderful, it's wonderful," the looking lady said, "and the price is also wonderful. But there is an odor so faint that it could almost be my imagination. It's the odor of old dried blood. No, it isn't. It's the odor of old still-wet blood. Whatever can it be?"

"There's something flitting around in here," the looking man said. "I just miss it with the corner of my eye. Oh, oh, it's the ghost hands, the 'Orange Ghost Hands'. This is the 'Haunted Hands' apartment isn't it? Can't you show us something else?"

"Oh yes, I have a wonderful place just around the corner," the rental lady said. "Not as wonderful as this, and not as wonderfully cheap, but it isn't haunted. We'll go see it now."

But the rental lady came up to me before she left. "Ghosty," she said, "why do you do this to me? And why can I see you and talk to you when the others can't?"

"It's that hellish machine you're hooked on," I said.

"Oh, oh, oh!" she said. "How can I get unhooked from it?"

"I wish I knew," I said. "I wish I knew."

Promontory Goats

*You with shelly horns, rams!
And promontory goats!*

— Meredith

I am surely the unlikely choice to write the introduction and correlation of this assessment-collection of the surviving works and personalities of Kasmir Szymansky.

Well, who wouldn't be an unlikely choice for it?

But I never liked Casey.

Well, who did?

This brings us up against a cliff right at the start. Casey Szymansky had a lot of assets that would seem to compel his being liked. He was handsome. He was talented. He was friendly, in a sometimes stumbling sort of way; and real friendliness often has this stumbling quality. He was not arrogant. He was not mean. He did not steal. He did not slander. He did not lie. He often offered a helping hand, most especially to those who needed it the most. He was rich in a pleasantly moderate way. He was iceberg-generous, as they say, meaning that he managed to conceal at least seven-eighths of his generosity. He was entertaining. He was hard-working. He had taste. He had kindness. He had intelligence of a high grade. He was neither drunken nor profligate. He was presentable. He was well-connected, and he kept no skeletons. No real scandal ever touched him. He had a good sense of the grotesque and a good sense of humor. He was his own worst enemy. But he was not, except on rare and short occasions, the enemy of anyone else. He was never jealous of the success of others. He was the

master of many subjects, and he could match the interests of almost anyone. He gave some of the finest small parties in town. He had a fine fund of unoffending and undirty jokes and stories. He went out of his way to do favors that no one else would think to do at all.

How did we manage *not* to like him?

Well, it wasn't easy, but we all managed it. There wasn't any collusion among his acquaintances on this. Each of us refused to like him by an individual effort.

There is very little of his work left in any field, and this is all the more amazing because he produced such mountains of work. In drawing and painting, in music, in verse and in prose, he cranked out a very lot of it. He destroyed most of it. The chimney of his house was called the Black Chimney of Hubbard Street because he burned so much of his stuff in the fireplace of his old house there. He sometimes recited his pieces to small groups, said that he would publish the things in the next issue of the Crock, and then destroyed the material. It is for this reason that even the scanty amount printed here is at least half reconstructed from the memories of those who heard it from him. Others of his things have been found in single surviving copies of some issues of the Crock. He often tried to corner and destroy entire issues, and my own collection has several holes in it. In each case, he said that he had no copy, that he wanted to run the sheets through a copy machine, and that he would return them the next day. And in each case he later confessed that he had burned them.

We all wish that we had more of his work today, but we don't particularly wish we had more of him today.

I suppose that his faults and his failures lay in his Elective Affinities. He didn't elect the same affinities that most of us did. I speak of his surviving works and his surviving personalities, but it is the most shoddy of each category that has survived. He was, I suppose, slightly insane. He certainly saw some things as exterior and material objects that the

rest of us did not see at all. His ideas of ransom and compensation and soul-trading were hardly orthodox. But he did not preach these ideas. They had to be dragged out of him, often by very unfair badgering.

Casey was not an extremist in politics or philosophy or theology or common outlook. The only thing he was extreme in, besides his pursuit of excellence, was his compassion. Is it then a sin to be compassionate in the extreme? In Casey's case, yes; I suspect that it was a serious sin. The special case by which Casey was so pursued and ridden was the old scholastic question of the Final Redemption of the Devil.

I was at boarding school with him in our high school days, and he was ridden by this obsession even then. We told him that it was, after all, a private matter between God and the Devil. He said that the put down had not been a private matter, and that the redemption should not be either. Our head-master, an old Benedictine priest, asked him why he made it his business.

"I have appointed myself advocate," Casey said (he was about thirteen years old then) "and that is what advocates are for."

"Kasmir, we do not have any revelation on this point," the old priest said. "You are free to believe what you will on it."

"I insist on revelation on this point," Casey said. "If anyone is denied a second chance, then we are all entitled to know about it."

As Melchisedech Duffey once said, a person should select his monomania early in life and stick with it. Casey surely stuck with his.

The form of this attempt to find and assemble the essence of some fifty years of Casey's works and days, from the time he was about fourteen years old, will be shaped by the container that was Casey himself. The surviving essence, which should obey the laws of all gasses, ought to conform to the shape of the empty container that Casey left by his going. I suppose that it does, but there are anomalies here

and there. The container even now, is not as empty as it looks. There are still invisible configurations and promontories in that emptied crock, and the essence will shape itself to them even when we are not aware of them. So it is a very peculiar shape that this assessment-collection takes.

Casey was unique, and it may be that a person who is really unique is not required to be anything else. He was, however, several other things. As to that state in which he presently finds himself, may he rest in peace (except for that one hour out of every twenty-four which he held to be special).

Demetrio Glauch
All Souls Day, Chicago
1984

RED SKY IN THE MORNING

And now a posse's up and got
And 'nobly losts' are found.
I think he should be rescued not.
I think he should be drowned.

So long as there's a sordid lot
That writhes unseemly low,
I think that God sometimes forgot
The things he used to know.

I fear the blade that skinked and shined,
I fear the lopped-off head.
I think that God is colour-blind
To certain shades of red.

There is nothing so ineffective as half-way denigration. It just makes nothing worthwhile. What is the fun of running a needle into a balloon with all the air already let out of it? How will you get a noise from an empty balloon?

Where is the worth in confronting a 'Great Ethical Teacher'? What is so misfired as 'Jesus the Incendiary'? What is so revolting as 'Jesus the Revolutionary'? What could be duller than 'A Hippie named Jesus'? What could be wronger than 'Teacher of Righteousness'? Judas Priest, how would the 'Christ of the Essenes' be worth blaspheming? How could any of these emptinesses be held responsible for anything? And I do want to hold someone responsible.

I believe there is a time for absolute stubbornness against either the prevailing order or disorder, but anyhow against whatever prevails. There is an absolute wrong that has the duty to contradict the absolute right. Absolutes must be pierced and deflated. If everything goes well in the universe, then I have the duty to see that something goes ill with me. There cannot ever be one absolute statement anywhere, if even one person contradicts it. Only the bottom of the well knows just how deep the well is. I will be the bottom of the world. If I suspect that there is something lower, then I will go lower. There is no one so vile that he should not have an advocate. If anyone ever is placed below salvation, then salvation should be rejected by all.

There is always the question of whether I am vile enough to do my chosen task successfully. It is necessary that, if I am to fill the role rightly, I must be the most vile person in the world. I work at it often, but I am not able to be as vile as I would wish. In everything that I do for others, I must do the best that I possibly can. In everything that I do for myself, I must do the worst that I can. If I am not vile enough to do this, then I fail to establish a rule. I have to be refused in everything but the last thing, or it's all lost. Oh pray that I may do badly enough to come to the bottom of all this!

OH LET THE DEVIL GO

Across the bloody rivers and

The smoking rocks, a road that still leads down
Even further
In a blood red glow,
'Tis the Devil burns, incontinent
His stool a sharpened goad that eviscerates and fissurates
With woe, woe, woe!

 It's no matter that he knowed this,
 When he planted this and growed this.
Oh God Almighty, burn me there,
And let the Devil go.
(Chorus: Oh God Almighty, burn me there,
 and let the Devil go!)

The pain it was a screaming that
The eye could only wonder it.
The burning flesh was noisome and
The guilt an over-flow.

The justice and the judgment it
Was boggle it and blunder it.
Oh something cries upon the crags
and something cries below.
 Oh let the mountain thunder it
 And hide the howler under it.
Oh someone, someone, burn me there,
And let the Devil go!
(Chorus: Oh someone, someone, burn me there,
 And let the Devil go!)

The Devil's reprehensible
and that's the gut and guff of it.
He chose it all with open eyes and set himself to crow.
He wasted flesh of innocents
and that's the stinking stuff of it,
He poisoned every spring, and he defiled, but even so
 That side is sure the rough of it,
 Enough of it, enough of it!
Oh put me in the fiery pit!
Oh let the Devil go!
(Chorus: Oh put me in the fiery pit!
 Oh let the Devil go!)

*Six lines are stricken out here as too vile to be read.
And then:*

Oh let the Devil loose at last
Let Casey go to Hell!
(Chorus: Oh let the Devil loose at last!

Let Casey go to Hell!)

FROM THE COMMENTARY OF CLARENCE SCHRADER:

"Casey's verses are all doggerel... His musical compositions hide a greatness, but they hide it well. His drawings are all comic, but only a few of them are meant to be. Let us consider the drawings on the opposite page:"

(For technical reasons, there is no drawing on the opposite page, but Schrader's description will suffice.)

"This supposed itself to be a drawing of hell, but it is a second-hand drawing of a second-hand hell. We believe that, in most respects, it is authentic. Well then, that means that hell is a second-hand or second-rate place.

"Casey has always wanted to draw, and he has always drawn badly. He tried many times to get his drawings into the '*Crock*', using false names on them. But I always told him, as long as I was art editor, he was out. He would have to fire me from the '*Crock*' to get any of his things into it. And then he slipped half a dozen of them in once when I was in the hospital. I was glad they had appeared, for certainly no one else had ever had anything like them.

"Spend a little time on the picture. It will haunt you as a better picture would not. The deforming element that is in all of Casey's art rings true here. He is rendering objectively deformed things. The four men he burlesques in this, Dali, Dore, Bosch, Finnegan, all knew hell. All portrayed it authentically, but with a light touch. This gives a queer contrast between the hellscapes done authentically but lightly and the burlesques of them done with clumsy humour and heaviness.

"In mystical writings we come on the phrase 'The Iron Meadows of Hell' so frequently as to lead us to believe that there *is* objective validity to this idea. The iron meadows are

in this picture by Casey, and they have the characteristic of being everywhere blurred and double-lined."



TO FRANCIS THOMPSON

If yet one field remains beflooden,
One unforgiving not set right,
For all you say to dawn 'Be Sudden!'
More sudden yet will be the night.

About those pinions, friend, my Francis,
That beat at these clay-shuttered doors
With sparkles yet, with light, with dances,
Aye, beat those wings at mine, or yours?

For lost compassion, sold or bought her,
Or traded her for broken midge, —
And lo, Christ walking on the water
Forgets the troll beneath the bridge.

Now the troll beneath the bridge, the subject of my sermon of this day, is the Devil. The bridge-keeper, the Pontiff, the Vicar, has the care of only the top side of the bridge. What goes on under the bridge is out of sight and out of mind, and yet it's an interesting life under the bridge. Sometimes a body will float by, and it may have some slight money in the pocket or gold in the teeth. And then the sub-pontine people have always been overly interested in bodies.

THE LIFE OF CASEY

The morning isn't ever neat,
Prae-prandium is seldom stately.
The dawn, they say, has golden feet:
But have you looked at them quite lately?
The spirit sags, the clock is fleet:

Oh what a world in which to waken!
Oh why should I stale crusties eat
When Casey has both eggs and bacon?

There is an evil in the land
That lurks, and cheats at easy-acey.
Oh why can all not upright stand
And live the life of Goodman Casey?

It is always a pleasure to be envied and to be looked up to.

I have always had an affection for witches. I met or conjured my first one when I was five years old, the summer before I started school. I read a story about a witch (I was precocious and I read early), and it contained the formula for conjuring a witch. At midnight you stand on the darkest corner in town, really a wide stretch of heath (but I didn't have any heath), and you say—

"I stand beside a blood filled ditch
Where dead men hang in trees to guide me.
I conjure you, Oh Wonder Witch,
Come from the moon and stand beside me!"

She did. It worked, and it will work every time. That particular witch still drops in to see me sometimes when she comes to Chicago. Her name is Tshowax.

The gallows always smells of rope,
I don't know why it shouldn't.
A gassing chamber smells of soap,
Though I'd have bet it wouldn't.
If time is pressing, take your love
Out like a kite and fly it,
For benison is from above,
And fate is low. Defy it!

FROM THE COMMENTARY OF ELENA O'HIGGINS

"I disapproved very much of the advertisement that Casey once ran in the '*Crock*': 'Genuine consecrated hosts \$1.00 each, sent postpaid by defrocked priest who still has the power of consecration. Use for fun or experiment, or for special rites. Prodigies sometimes occur during their use.' A box number was given to send to. I do not know how much response there was to that ad, but it ran in at least three issues of the '*Crock*'...

"Notice the musical score by Casey on the facing page. It is the only portion of the scoring for the organ that I was able to salvage before he destroyed a very great work. What looks like charring around the edges of the musical sheet is indeed that."

(For technical reasons, there is no musical score on the facing page, but the description of Elena O'Higgins will suffice.)

"This is consecrated music that Casey has written here. Oh try it, play the fragment, and think what the whole might have been! But what he substituted for it after destroying it was supposed to be used for fun or for experiment or for special liturgy. 'You can go to hell for such special liturgies, Casey,' I told him. 'That's the idea, Elena, that's the idea,' he said.

"The substitute piece is not scored for organ or any sacred instrument. It is now scored for the kazoo, for the peewee guitar, and for the musical saw, for God's sake! They use it at St. Cristina's Church where they're working hard to be the most trendy parish in Chicago."

FROM THE COMMENTARY OF TONY APOSTOLO

"I have been a newspaper reporter and editor and feature-writer for enough years to have a matching story for everything. If an Angel out of Heaven should come down

this evening bringing the text of the Fifth Gospel, I could take him to old files and show him that I had done the Angel-out-of-Heaven-with-the-Text-of-the-Fifth-Gospel story seven years ago. And if the living Hitler should walk through that door right now, I would be able to tell him 'This is not so exclusive as you might think.' I have the record here of seven different reporters to whom seven different Hitlers have made appearances. It isn't enough for a living Hitler merely to appear and tell his story. He has to be able to do something else if he's going to put together any sort of act at all. Can you sing? Can you do imitations? Can you play the mouth-organ?

So the claims made by and for Casey Szymansky do not come to me as new claims. The idea of a man trading souls or trading places with the Devil to liberate him from damnation is a frequent psychological quirk or obsession. Casey is the fourth man I know who believes he has done it. And he is the fifth man I know who believes he is the Anti-Christ. And he is the sixth man I know who believes that he is the Scape Goat for all the sins of the world."

The Scapegoat takes the rocky road
And never ever wins.
He's goaded by a gimpy goad
And laden with our sins.

FROM THE COMMENTARY OF D'ALESSANDRO

"Casey walked into one of my post-graduate classes one afternoon when I was putting several series of trialÂ balloon equations on the blackboard. Casey walked up and changed one value in the ninth equation. Several of my more brilliant students laughed, though I do not know why. One of them then reversed a vector value in my nineteenth equation. And Casey and the more brilliant students laughed still more loudly. I asked what it was.

“ ‘You'll get it after a while,’ Casey said. ‘Some people just aren't as fast as others at things like this.’ (And I am one of the world's leading mathematicians.)

“But I did not get it, not in a day or a week or a year. I asked my most brilliant student John Tweed (who had meanwhile become world-famous) about it. ‘It would spoil it to tell it,’ he said. ‘I don't believe there is any way it could be put verbally anyhow. It is just a couple of mathematical puns, oi, oi, in sort of dialect yet! Some people just don't get inter-discipline mathematical puns very well.’

“I still don't get it.”



The Devil knows the future only in fragments, but he knows the past completely, and he rides right up on the cutting edge to the present. That is where I want to ride. I want to know all the secrets of everybody in the world. I insist on it. And if I have to change into something else to know all the secrets then I will change into something else. I will change into the Casey Machine.

BALLAD OF THE CASEY MACHINE

“Oh friend, Oh my friend, Oh you mouth of a horse,
Oh *you* the most peachy impeachable source,
Oh tell me the things on the people so coarse,
And *who* was defamed and defaulted and worse,
Oh tell me what's par on the cheap-shotter course.
Oh tell me perforce.”

“These things, Oh my crumb, are a dollar a line,
Or traded in moistness over strange wine.
They're *not* for the peasants, they *are* not for thee.

For God and the Devil and Casey they be,
Or for fee."

"I look in the windows, I hark at the wall,
I never will ever learn all of it all.
I want to know *what's* with the wax in the ball,
I want to know *when* it was last on the house,
I want to know *who* is behung like a mouse,
I want to know *which* has the heart of a louse,
I want to find *out* who's been milking my cowse.
Tell me, grouse."

"These things, my companion, may none of us see,
But God and the Devil and Casey, those three
Who have it for free."

"Oh mother, my mother," the little child said,
"Oh tell me how rotten a life you have led,
The people you ruined from alpha to zed,
And addled poor father until he was dead.
Oh tell me the fellows with-whomish to bed,
On which the forbiddenish fruits you have fed.
Tell me all."

"Oh child, Oh my child, this is rotten of you.
The damage you'd do if you knew that you knew!
These things, little pretzel are hidden from view,
For God and the Devil and Casey, their due.
Tootle-oo."

"There's a way, my companion, my bacon and bean,
No matter at bottom it isn't too clean:
'Tis easy to eye and to spy every scene.
Go *do* like the case on the Casey Machine.
He traded off something that never was keen,
And now he knows everything lofty and mean.

The Machine!”

The Casey machine, for I *will* be a machine when I have made the swap, will know all about everyone. That is what I want to do. This will be all the satisfaction that the Casey Machine can ever count on, knowing it all.

You have heard of persons saying they would give their souls to know a certain secret. I am giving my soul to know all the secrets.

FROM THE COMMENTARY OF SILAS AND MAUD WHITERICE

“A cheap and shoddily-done encyclopedia was published here in Chicago last year. The first volume of it (A-C) was given away widely in a grocery-store promotion. Subsequent volumes sold for a dollar each with twenty dollars worth of groceries. About one percent of the copies of Volume One of this encyclopedia have an entry that is not in the other copies of it:

“ ‘*ANTICHRIST*: born in Chicago, U.S.A. on October 7, 1921, the son of Gabriel Szymansky a pawn broker and antique dealer and his wife Miriam Lessing. The child was Kasmir (Casey) W. Szymansky. His manifestation as the Antichrist was, was, was, organization formed in 1839 to work for the repeal of the English corn laws.’

“The verbal confusion at the end of this short entry is from running the defective *ANTICHRIST* entry into the following article which in most of the copies is headed ‘*ANTI-CORN-LAW LEAGUE*’. Could this be a hoax? Anything could be a hoax. The Encyclopedia was published in Chicago, and the elegant Casey often did printing for shoddy promoters. Did Casey himself insert the hoax? Or was it some of the droll kidders who worked for him at the old printery? A hoax it certainly was, but was its information accurate? Yes, the

place and the date and the names are right. That is the where and the when and the from-whom of the birth of Casey Szymansky. And that is the where and the when and the from-whom of the birth of the Antichrist.”



SONNET TO PAINED VICTORY

From every pride beswollen-anima
Come vilest beasts to take the dismal loads.
Oh hear the scapegoat feet on rocky roads!
Oh hark the high backed swine of Gadera!

Pained victory, through fire, from death, some win,
Or many lose whose hands will not let go.
Oh what poor walking bones in mean escrow
For expiating promontory sin!

This is the desert traffic, hot with fear,
And prodigies appeared in pungent flame,
And texts on parched interiors of throats

Announcing things for here and after-here,
Or bales laid down of heavy greed and shame,
And bloody spume of promontory goats.

SONNET TO AN IRON SKY

I *will* not mourn on Purgatory's hills
If ever I will come to live so high.
We'll paint our dome consensus-blue for sky,
And sing our buried song of grindy mills.

'Tis really to be washed with hopefulness
And happiness in work begrimed and sore.
It's true we'd be content with something more,
Or less, or less, or less, or less, or less.

We glimpse salvation as a distant light.
Our crooked path will (such may we atone)
(It seems an aeon) rise a foot more high,

In hundred years punch three more holes in night,
And find each day our ground is softer stone,
And iron sun more bright in iron sky.

I am an unsavory person, although I do affect a delightful exterior. It is we unsavory persons who anticipate everything. Were it not for us, nothing would ever begin, and nothing would ever change. Or else things would begin and change very much as they do now, and we would not be missed. I suspect that the latter is the true condition, but I will act on the supposition that the former is true.

We do not really break any trails for people or things to follow, we know that. We do break trails, but they are all dead-end trails. And then other trails are laid out and they are used. Our own trails must sometimes resemble the latter trails in location and type; it would be strange if they did not. And our own short-lived trails will also differ entirely and fundamentally from the latter trails in most ways. Very well, we will emphasize the likenesses, and we will ignore the unlikenesses. And we will make our claims to primogeniture.

There had to be a dozen false chaoses before a true chaos was ever effected. There had to be a dozen false cosmoses or ordered creations before a real creation succeeded. There had to be twenty false falls before the two valid falls (that of angels, and that of men) took place. Falls are tricky. It is hard to fall from grace with grace, or even with an acceptable degree of awkwardness. Before the true redemption there had to be a dozen false redemptions; and after the true, there had to be many more of the false, and they are still going on. Before the compensation and the ransom there had to be false compensations and ransoms.

Before the term of the times, there will have to be many false terms. Before the return of Christ, there must be a dozen returns of false Christs, and one of them will be larger and more conspicuous than the others. Before the end of the

world, there must be very many false endings; and I suspect that some of them will be very well done and pretty convincing.

I will take part in as many of the false preludes as I can. There might be a final upheaval by which the false will become true and the true will become false. Before final compensation, there must be a precursory false compensation to melt all heart-stones; and I have selected this as my special thing.

Some of our early efforts were not too bad. We made goats before sheep and asses before horses and buffalo before cattle. Does God claim that *he* made the goats and the asses and the buffalo. No, no, he claims too much. We made them, we the unsavory people.

FROM THE COMMENTARY OF HILARY HILTON

Casey wanted me to kill him. He almost dragged me into it several times. But all of that was only a piece of something much smaller. Casey's flight from life and from reality is a shriveled sign of the times.

Casey is an anti-hero, and he has all the kinky ideas that an anti-hero must have. But his main and overriding notion is only a bit of dismal show-boating. Just as all persons who claim they are reincarnated will make the pitch at being reincarnated from somebody high, Caesar, Napoleon, Cleopatra, the Queen of Sheba, Marie Antoinette, Joan of Arc, so all persons who claim to trade souls will have pretense of trading with notables of either light or darkness. Casey's pretense of trading souls with the Devil is this sort of fraud. If he does trade souls with somebody, he will probably trade with the sickest grub under the sickest log in the most extreme trash lot anywhere.

One would almost gather that I didn't like Casey, and yet I do like him well enough. He is totally useless, of course,

and he is a coward; but many of my friends are. I admire his intellect, and his quick and balanced understanding of the arts. His fooling around with my wife, trying to find an easier and less demanding death than suicide, is the only real obstacle between us.

Sure, I pretty well know the scenario for Casey. There is always a tag on Casey that insures that he will be taken care of. Such tags are placed on a person by the One who has the right to place them, and they *must* be obeyed. It's a little like the Mark of Cain which says "You must not kill this man." There is a mark on Casey that says "This man will always require easy sums of money. See to it that he has as much as he requires." There is a mark on Casey that says "This man must not be unduly embarrassed or harassed. See to it that he is not." There is a sign on him that says "This man has a peculiar need to feel important. See that he does feel so." There is a symbol on him that says "This man has a love of farce, and a fear that his farces should fail. See to it that they do not fail." But Casey's whole soul-trading gag is a dangerous farce. I'm to see that it does not fail? What side am I on anyhow?

These signs are placed on Casey by God, and I'll not argue with God on such matters. I'll obey, though sometimes it gags me. There isn't more than one of us in ten thousand who sees such signs on persons (though other persons may see other signs to which we are blind). We are the only ones who would be able to do anything about such signs anyhow.

There is another sign on Casey that says "This man has to be loved. Love him." God over my head, I have other things to do! You don't really know Casey. This could get sticky. But the sign is still there. Oh all right, I'll love him. But I wouldn't do it if it weren't for the sign saying to.

There is one other sign on Casey. Perhaps I am the only one who has read it. It says "This man is the Instrument for the Salvation and Damnation of Many." So be it. Fortunately the sign did not say "See to it". I wouldn't know how.



Hell was once a pleasant, though isolated place. Some portions of it still are. They are places of natural happiness with only the happiness of the Beatific Vision absent. But most parts of Hell are horrible, of pain more manifold, of suffering more extreme than anything that can be imagined on Earth.

The tradition of extreme torture was built up slowly in Hell. The persons in Hell drew themselves into groups. Even the most proud and solitary individuals, finally, after a few millennia, formed themselves into small, proud and solitary groups. It was a custom for persons there to ask for whatever pleasures or preferences they wished, and these were given to them. Then it developed that a person could ask whatever he wished for the others of his group, if he also accepted it for himself. And these groups began to arrive at rougher and rougher consensus. People, out of perversity, voted slight displeasures for their fellows, even though they had to suffer these displeasures themselves. And it grew. From the mouse of malodorous small enjoyments was born the mountain of taking pleasure in the terrible tortures of others, even if it meant the same tortures for the self. It grew and grew, it even overflowed Hell and spilled some of its stuff on Earth.

The imagination, over long stretches of timeless time, will devise tortures and pleasures in torture beyond credence. And the shriek is always “more, more, more!” There cannot be an ultimate in torture, since there is ever more extreme torture beyond.

The persons can get out of it at any time, of course. One may always withdraw from a group, and join a pleasure minded group, or none at all. But the torture groups now outnumber the pleasure groups thousands to every one. Oh sure the shrieking, horrible pain and suffering and

despondency, the unending agony of it all is beyond endurance. But to withdraw from it would be to lose the ultimate lust, the pleasure in the torture of one's fellows, the joyous gloating over the screaming, even when one must scream in blinding pain oneself.

This is a little known, but true, explanation of one aspect of a well-known place.

And how of those of us who offer to change places with the damndest of those poor damned souls would suffer in their places. Is it rational to make such offers when these persons can come out of their tortures at any time? It is not rational, no. But it is a greater sacrifice to trade places with one who is too proud to accept release on compromise terms. And the Greatest Sacrifice is beyond reason.



SONNET TO OBDURATE GOD

Defiances are yet such petty things
From smallish minds to other minds too small.
Oh may we let all dim distinctions fall
And thou and we will equally be kings.

A commoner should treat with thee sublime,
But how the better treat if he should kneel?
Irreverence, they say, sets stars to reel;
They surely must be dizzy by this time.

A few demands for very minimum;
A clutch of questions straightly to be faced;
A list of things that *we* to *thee* allow:

Thou'lt haste and clarify thy Kingdom Come,
Else, failing this, thou'lt find thyself replaced;
We want it stringless, and we want it now!

FROM THE COMMENTARY OF MELCHISEDECH DUFFEY

We have to examine the person Kasmir Szymansky in the Argo context, in the Medieval context, in the secular context (of the last or the next to last seculum), and in the Eschatological context. His identity is slippery through all of these, but I will try to nail it down.

As to the last of these four contexts, we tend to forget that each of us has a part to play in this end-of-time drama. It does not matter whether we are dead eighty thousand years and are a distantly-related sort of interglacial man, we will be brought back to play a role. It does not matter whether we were a high or low person on the antediluvian scene, we will be brought back for the last drama. It does not matter if we died only a century ago and are in Heaven or Purgatory or Hell, we will come back to do a turn upon the boards. It does not matter whether we are alive in another place, we will come to the final place for the final show.

There will be quite a few persons in that eschatological extravaganza, but each one will be heard, as is each piece in an orchestra, and the absence of even one of them would be noticed. But it will not seem as if there are too many characters; and those billions will not *be* too many. A part was written for every one of them before the worlds began. Each of us will have a clear part, and each of us will recognize and know and understand the import of every other.

But a very few persons, and I believe that Casey is among them, will receive a script of their parts ahead of time. Some of these parts will require special study, either because of slight defects or retardation in the person or because of the intricacy of the roles themselves.

In his primordial role (the Argo role for the group to which he belongs) we have Casey as Peleus.

In the Medieval role, he is split into two aspects. He is Kasmir Gorshok (Casey the Crock) a ninth century scholar and necromancer in the Low Middle Ages part of this role. He is Prince Casimir in the High Middle Ages part of this role, but there is not really a serious split here.

In the secular context he is Kasmir (Casey) Szymansky of Chicago.

In the eschatological context, he is either the Antichrist, or (much more likely) one of the false and premature antichrists who will buzz about as flies of the Lord of the Flies. But Casey must not pass under the final dominion of that lord.

In all of the roles there is a certain consistency of character.

As Peleus, he is the great hero of Thessaly only because it is stated that he is that great hero. This is the sign placed upon him and it must be credited. He does nothing heroic, but he does little that is cowardly either. He is indecisive, and he is buffeted by accidents. He kills his half-brother Phocus by accident. He kills his father-in-law Eurytion by accident. He is badger-gamed by Acastus of Iolcus and his wife.

I remember him as a good and brave, but not heroic, crewman on the Argo. Everybody knew Peleus as a good man. Aye, as a good man that evil things happened to. He was the father of Achilles, and the hidden heroism of Peleus went openly into that son.

In the Lower Middle Ages, Casey was Kasmir Gorshok (the Crock). This man was a sorcerer and a person of great compassion for all small and unfortunate creatures. He wept so much over the misfortunes of helpless things that he wore out three pair of eyes. Being a sorcerer, he was able to make new eyes for himself. His own original eyes had been a deep brown-black. Those he made for himself after these were worn out were first blue, then grey, then green. (The secular Casey also had blue eyes as a youth, then grey eyes, and

now green eyes; I cannot find out what color of eyes he was born with.)

Kasmir Gorshok in particular had compassion on the body louse, a creature that lived a dangerous and short life always sought after by murderous fingers. It was because of this particular compassion that Kasmir the Crock called on all his sorcery and invented and manufactured a race of artificial persons. He made them with warm and blood-filled bodies and gave them a fragrance that attracted the body louse strongly. Thereupon, the body lice left their human hosts (it had always been an angry and uncomfortable relationship) and went to live upon the artificial people that Kasmir Gorshok had made. Descendants of these artificial people are still living in the world.

The Animated Marvels that I myself made in this the twentieth century (and Casey in his secular manifestation is one of them) were constructed to much the same purpose. This, at least, is what I have told them all. But these hulking animations of mine just grin and doubt me. They say that I must have had some other purpose in making them, even if I have forgotten it. Well, if I had another purpose, I have forgotten it.

In the High Middle Ages, Casey was Prince Casimir of Poland, and he also became Saint Casimir. He was called the “father and defender of the poor and unfortunate”, but he thwarted the rich and mighty sometimes. He thwarted his own father King Casimir IV by taking a life-long vow of chastity and so refusing the succession. One can still hear the bellowing of the outraged old king on a clear night.

Prince Casimir died at the age of twenty-three. (‘Died’ in the case of one like Casey indicated a peculiar withdrawal out of the world for some centuries; but the people thought that he had died.) It would be best if all good and compassionate persons should die at age twenty-three, before being trapped into something awkward by the backlash of their own virtues.

The present (though presently absent) Casey, the Casey of the twentieth century secularity, is, like his old person of Peleus, a hero only because the sign on him says that he is a hero. Once again he is indecisive, and he is buffeted by accidents. Hilary Hilton and his wife Mary Jean are the Acastus-and-the-wife to Casey in the present case, but the badger game that they play on him is in reverse. Casey may really have sought death at Hilary's hands (Hilary claims, and has never been disputed in it, that he can whip any man in the world), but he found derision instead, and it hurt more. I don't know what Hilary wanted out of Casey, and I sure don't know what Mary Jean wanted.

The original badger-game, by Acastus and his wife, may also have been in reverse, now that I think of it.

Hilary Hilton is one of those who has mocked at the long-lived ones of us, particularly those who claim to have been notables in their pasts. But he does this to disguise the case that he himself is a long-lived one, that he has been a notable in his own past, that he was used in anecdote and fact by our Lord Himself. For Hilary was the certain rich man (St. Jerome in his letters gives Hilarius as the traditional name) who was not able to lay down his riches and so went away sorrowing, and now he will come hardly into the Kingdom.

In his secular person in the approximately present world, Casey has been a very good person again. He has estranged himself from his natural companions with his double talk and double-dealing on the Church. He has even spoken that wormiest of chestnuts, that he has 'outgrown' the Church. As is always the case, he has not been able to grow up with it. In many ways Casey hasn't been able to grow up, and he often stands like a man in child's clothes that fit him badly. Casey lacks the adult form in every one of his manifestations. He is only a boy, a child, an unsufferably precocious child. Remember that about him, God. He is a child, and he should be tried in childrens' court.

As to the Casey of the becoming, of the future, or the eschatological scene, well my way and his intersect again in that future. I will dispute him, and I will give him transport against my will. But there's an inhibition against my telling this.

I have been to the future and have come back. I have been to the other side of death and have come back. And I have seen the fierce creature that eats the tongues out of the mouths of those persons who tell what they are forbidden to tell.

Oh Lord, let me keep my tongue this while.

FROM THE COMMENTARY OF ABSALOM STEIN

There is a legend long current in our several circles of acquaintances that Casey Szymansky and myself have traded souls, and that by this I have become the fine and upstanding person that he had been, and he has become the sleazy individual that I had been. I had known Casey pretty well before the so called soul-trading had taken place, and we had about an equal amount of sleaze. We also had about the same amount of upstandingness. These qualities may have been arranged a bit in each of us, but I do not believe that the proportions have been greatly changed.

What we did trade was one each of our *kabouters*. A *kabouter* an interior goblin, or a crankiness, or a complex, or a fixation, or a psychological stumbling-stool. Everyone has several of these manifest goblins or *kabouters* in his personality. Well, they are crankinesses, or perhaps they are discrete people of a trivial species. Either case can be proved easily enough. The proof to me that these *kabouters-goblins* are objective, though immaterial persons is that we *did* trade them with rather explosive effect, and that they impressed me as persons at the transaction moment and since.

A *kabouter* will know a great amount of secret stuff that goes on inside a man, having lived there. So now I am forever privy to certain unkempt secrets of Casey Szymansky, and he is privy to certain of mine. This seems to bother him more than it bothers me. But to the question "What's going on in there?" I can answer pretty well, as respects Casey. The answer is "Not quite as much as you would think."

Casey believes, or affects to believe, that he must go to Hell in my place, although I hadn't intended to go there and hadn't any place reserved there. But it is one piece of a problem that has plagued him from his boyhood. Casey wants (or at least he had an attraction-repulsion for the idea) to go to Hell for someone. Several of his old friends have set it down as a piece of extravagant comedy on his part, but the *kabouter* I have from him tells me that the largest element in this urge is real compassion for any damned person and the desire to free that person.

He began, I believe, to play this as a very dangerous game, and he made up very dangerous rules for it. Then he discovered that someone else was making rules for the game that he thought he had invented, and he became very scared. Casey's announced aim is to trade souls with the Devil and release him from Hell, a Lord-Byronish type of phoniness that speaks for itself.

Casey now considers his trading souls with me to have been a sort of practice for trading souls with the Devil. Hey, what does that make me then? What does it make Casey?

I like Casey, in spite of his tiresome 'nobody likes me' attitude. I should be able to do something for him. About the only exceptional talent I have is the talent of getting in to see the really big people, using nothing but brashness. Well, I will see some very big people in the various worlds if I have to do so to help him. We really are blood-brothers now, whether he likes it or not. In a showdown, I would come

closer to going to Hell for him than he would to going to Hell for me, or the Devil, or anyone.



I am a patsy set up by spirits I don't even know the name of. They prowl me and they take advantage of me. They read my mind—(no, of course they don't read my mind; that cannot be done; but they read the verbalizing of my brain) —, and they turn me into an instrument for unclean purpose.

As to this mind-reading, there is scientific stuff to it, and there is “thus far and no farther” stuff. I have questioned my scientific friends about it, Mark McClatchy, Catherine Quick, Morris Poor, Silas Whiterice, and I have read up in the journals about it, and I've bounced it around in my head. I ask “To what extent can minds be read, by anyone, but particularly by invading and intelligent spirits?” I find that brains can be read but minds cannot, and hardly anyone is willing to draw a wide line between the two. Insofar as we think in words, those words can be lifted out of the brain. They can be taken from our verbalizing and its accompaniment in the movement of the vocal muscles. This can give very extensive readings. And there are subliminal readings once removed and twice removed. There are electrical patterns, both kymatic and akymatic, in the brain; there are instrumented inferences; there are chemical fix patterns and molecular congruencies. It might be said that any thought word can be interpreted.

Max Müller the German philologist said that *all* thought was verbal thought. It isn't, but most intentions and schemes and plans are thought in words and can be read in words. Could a remembered or evoked color, not accompanied by the name of a color, be read out of the brain? Certainly, there are brain wave patterns to

correspond to any color or shape or smell or sound being received. Sophisticated investigators would be able to read them out, and sophisticated spirits.

Are no secret thoughts sacred then? Yes, a few are. From my investigations, I come to one conclusion. Ransacking *spirits* loose in a body or a brain are allowed to loot information by any *physical* means or indication. But these raiding spirits are not allowed to use any *spirit* or nonphysical or immaterial means.

Fair enough. We will play by those rules.

But I tell you this, ransacking spirits, I have not meant all the things I have said nor all the things that I have thought, and I fight being made a patsy in certain matters.

SONNET TO OBSOLETE GOD

For colored memory of early joys
You still do hold most brightly painted place,
Nor will I let you go without a trace,
You final one of all my childhood toys.

In aeoned Heaven in the Sign of Fish,
Bemused by your own memories, you nod.
When small I always wanted to be God;
I make my move now, reaching for that wish.

How feels it in the land named '*obsolete*'?
How tastes it on the further end of time,
To be so big a thing, and be forgot?

Your empty mansion should be cool and sweet.
Perhaps it needs renewing somewhat. I'm
A spirit of the time. And you are not.

But how does one get out of a really devouring situation?
I am being eaten up. I am being swallowed alive. Is this
myself going down those dark red gullets so smoothly? I am

Casey, but I want out of the Casey Szymansky Movement. I want to be clear out of it. How did I get in it anyhow?

FROM THE COMMENTARY OF MARGARET STONE

“There is a valid and pious practice among certain Catholic children that is documented as going back more than one thousand years, yet its signatures and characteristics seem to be much older than that. The cultus seems to have its first setting in Rome of the Empire days, to be centered in the frame of Diocletian legalism. This cultus and practice consists of a child taking the place, for one hour usually, of the most forgotten soul in Purgatory. It is very painful, but it is not desolating. It is quite rewarding.

“To serve such an hour is to be washed with hopefulness and grace. One could offer to serve there longer, but not forever; for there is no ‘forever’ in Purgatory. Release is already guaranteed. I served such hours several times, but I am no longer able to serve them. The mechanism and the contacts for serving them are blotted out. It is a service that is not open to adults.

“I questioned Casey about this once, when I had heard that he was talking nonsense about trafficking with the Devil. He remembered the cultus from his childhood, but he had never entered into it. He had been *afraid*. He was afraid of one hour in Purgatory, but he big-mouths about an eternity in Hell.

“I think that Casey's mind has blown.”

Starved folks buried underfeet,
Give us dead-man's bread to eat.

FROM THE COMMENTARY OF JOHN SCHULTZ

“It is a philosophical as well as a mathematical necessity that the offer be made, unconditionally. The offer has been called “the very bottom cellar of silliness”; nevertheless, it must be made for the shape of the house above the cellar. I believe that the offer has been made, conditionally, many times by many different persons. I believe that it will be made by Prince Casimir several times conditionally, and that the conditions will have to be broken out of it one by one till finally it is made unconditionally. And then the final requirement of the offer is that it must fail.

But how is Holy Prince Casimir involved in such a thing as Ransom of the Devil? He always had a fine mind, but he almost always enlisted that mind in the service against reason. He always had a deep compassion — for anything except people. Dogs or cats or birds or bugs, or spirits clean or unclean, or half-way species real or imaginary, he had deep compassion for all these things, but not for people. “Let the people have compassion on one another,” he said, “but who will have compassion on suffering plants of the field if I do not?”

Such compassion as he had was a bullet and a bomb. It was a fuse to ignite the world and burn it down also. Such compassion is born insane, which some may find to be an objection against it.

I recently had, and am still having, an odd but valid mystical-mathematical vision of a cosmic change detected and noted in a classroom. This may be yesterday or today or tomorrow, but it is immediate, before the ending of the seven days times seven.

The great mathematician is scratching in chalk before a group of graduate students, and he figures the implications of new values and functions. The great mathematician is a true portrayal, cubistically, for he is a simultaneous montage of the three most famous mathematicians in the world.

“It is a different universe now,” the mathematician says, and he demonstrates that it is. And the graduate students gasp as they catch the implications. One had but to look at the spooky equations set out there to see that the world was changed, the buildings were changed, the bodies of all the students were changed. The change was not in size nor in general appearance. Only persons trained in post-secular mathematics would be able to follow the implications. The average half-educated person would not notice anything different in the world, even though every electron and neutrino in every atom of the world had been changed. The seventh line that the mathematician put on the board there — Oh my God, that seventh line! A cosmos could be swallowed up in the implications of that line and never seen again.

“Aye, it's a whole, new, and different universe that we have now,” the mathematician was saying. “Such a complete alteration we have had no more than a score of times before; no more than five or six times since the appearance of man. It is the nature of the universe to change completely at intervals, but it is inherently conservative and will not fulfill this nature without grave reason. But the appearance of a chicken-hearted devil will not only rotate every vector value in the universe one hundred and twenty degrees in the counter-clockwise direction, but will also (as you can see by the ninth line) introduce a—”

It isn't the vision that always fades out at that point; it is myself that fades out. The disturbing vision will not go away. It happens more validly and more clearly all the time. I suspect that all the people will have to go away and the vision will remain.

Casey Szymansky is a spellbinder. That is one of the least known facts about him, and some persons have been acquainted with him for years and have not known this about him. He does not spellbind persons; he spellbinds

crowds. But he addresses crowds very seldom because of this. He doesn't love his spellbinding talent; mostly he tries to hide it away; but he has it.

On a bet, he once walked uninvited onto a stage where that turgid drama *Goat Boy*, with Adrian Abdo in the title role, was playing at the Castle Theatre. Casey carried a Greater Chicago phone directory with him. He opened it at random and began to read names in a passionate and ecstatic voice. And suddenly it was pandemonium in the old Castle. Girls shrieked and squealed, matrons moaned like Carolina doves, boys howled, and men stood and shouted.

Casey read only seven names, and then he stopped. There were absolutely unceilinged ovations! But, later, no one could remember the reason for such carrying on.

Anyhow, Casey won the bet, whatever it was. He always represented a danger ready to go out of control. It only takes one spark, if it be a special sort of spark, to ignite and burn down a universe. And Casey could conceivably be a spark of almost any sort.

For his last month, and right up to the strange ending of him, he was surrounded by sudden crowds of insane people. Nobody had ever seen anything like them.

Casey died then, after a month of extreme pressure from his followers. He really died, I believe, to get away from his mad followers who were a little too much for him. Casey had always been fastidious.

Now they have stolen his body away. Beside his open grave they set a plaque — '*Non est hic; surrexit enim*', which is to say 'He is not here; he is risen'. How corny can you get?"

From all evil of this day,
Libera nos, Domine!

FROM THE COMMENTARY OF COUNT FINNEGAN

It's an odd process to try to reconstruct a man out of little pieces of paper, when possibly that man isn't dead yet.

People, for a few decades, thought that I was dead; and maybe I was dead and maybe I wasn't. And whatever I am reconstructed out of now, it may be less substantial than little pieces of paper.

I'd give more than paper to reconstruct Casey though; I'd give an arm or a leg or an eye; but not a head, and not a soul. A piece of paper is almost too easy an offering.

One thing about Casey that no one else seems to have noticed; he's lost his mind. He's as nutty as a Lever Brothers Coconut plantation. He's fishy as the Grand Banks themselves. He always did attract weak-fish and weak-fish opinions; but his compassion has been genuine. He is sometimes taken by transports of it. He cries easily but privately over the case of helpless things. The shape of a conch can mist him over, or the dulling of a Lesser Cat's eye that he picked up on yesterday's beach. Between Morotai and Soemsoem Islands where we were long ago, the Molucca wind used to set up a sort of double ripple on the near glassy green water, and the pattern of it shook him every time he saw it. He had a Buddhist regard for small bugs and beasts, and he would take great care not to harm any small thing. Now he has lost his framework and is committed to helping a large thing that is far from helpless. He is insane, gently but dangerously insane.

Ah, now comes the silly question from someone on the fringe: "With Casey who would know the difference?"

I would know the difference.

Simple insanity is like heresy in one way. It loses, or it throws out, only one thing of many, and it keeps the rest. It allows the original structure (whether of mind or of institution) to stand, with only one big gaping hole in it. Sometimes the structure will collapse quickly then (if the

gaping hole is at the heart of it); but sometimes it will stand for a very long time with the wind whistling through that hole. If the wind does not happen to blow from the wrong direction, one might not even notice the insanity, or the heresy.

He had last compassion for every last least thing, and all the rest of it is noise. His excessive commitment to the Monsterousness is all noise, done as he goes over the edge.

God, have mercy on that man! I do not ask it lightly.



Make me not such leader be
Let this cup depart from me.

Of former lives, of former aspects, of former roles, I believe that Melchisedech Duffy implanted all of them in us as educational devices. I believe that it was the doing of his damned talismans. Oh certainly, I remember all the old episodes; but did they happen? Or were pieces of old Greek mythology and of other sorts of myth implanted in us?

Who gave Duffy such power as he once had in such things?

He does not know.

Who gave me such real but crooked powers as I now begin to evince?

I do not know.

What am I anyhow? I'm an old wineskin full of new wine.

Then I will burst it, and both wine and wineskin will be lost.

No, no! I protest against it! I do not *want* to be filled with such new wine. I asked for it, yes, but I didn't want it.

I remember the Spanish hero Cid Campeador, dead and tied upright in his saddle on his horse, and leading his army to a great victory with his wild riding, such wild riding as

nobody had ever seen before. But what had a dead man to lose in taking the hurdles that way?

I remember the skull of the great law-giver Justinian, set on a rough hewn council table in those dim centuries when the Empire had all but disappeared into the Gothic fog. There was a snake coiled within the great law-giver's skull. Questions were asked of the skull and of its snake. If the answer was 'yes', the snake slithered its head and half length out of the right eye-socket of the skull. If the answer was 'no', the snake slithered its head and half length out of the left eye-socket. So the judgment was given to chieftains on great matters, and it was accepted.

I see myself as leading an insane army of overturners intent on destroying this world, and the next one, and the one after that. But am I responsible for what my body does after I'm dead? (I suppose that I'm dead; that seems to be the most reasonable explanation for certain phenomena.)

I will disassociate myself from what comes after me. I say 'It is not myself who gives these judgements. It is the snake in my skull.'



FROM THE COMMENTARY OF BASCOM BAGBY

"That fish, Prince Casimir (Casey Szymansky) has always been hard both to like and to dislike. He is here now. He is not in Hell. That is a false report that he has gone to Hell and is making arrangements for his second coming. The arrogance and kinkiness has mostly gone out of him. He is very sick though, and he has a long road to recovery.

"He has great concern for the goat caravans that arrive here every day. There has long been the cultus of praying for us Poor Souls in Purgatory; but the effect has not been so

much the taking up of the burdens of the Souls here as the sending to us of further burdens to bear. People phrase their prayers for us very strangely. They pray mostly for themselves, that they be rid of their burdens. And they mention our names. And those burdens arrive here every day on caravans of laden scapegoats. Casey works with the beat-up and burden-weary goats pretty well. He is a good animal man, and he patches them up as well as can be done.

“Casey is here. So he is not elsewhere, so the predicted prodigies of him will not take place. —unless this is a pseudo or effigy Casey who is here. That is possible, though barely.”

FROM THE COMMENTARY OF DEMETRIO GLAUCH

“Casey's body is stolen. This casts a new darkness on the matter. Believe it, it was not stolen by strangers. It was stolen by his own supporters or associates. I am reminded of an advertisement that appeared in the last but one issue of the *‘Crock’*, when the insane followers were driving Casey out of his wits and to his death.

“ ‘Genuine emptied temples (still covered by consecration guarantee), dead bodies sent postpaid by certified grave robbers. Use them for fun or experiment, or for special rites. Prodigies sometimes occur during their use’. A box number was given to order bodies from, and requests for specific bodies were solicited. The price was not given in the ad, but somewhere else in the *‘Crock’* was a note that the bodies ran from fifty dollars each to two thousand dollars each.

“But Casey's body, if it is held by the same grave robbers, would probably cost a Prince's ransom, or a Devil's ransom.

“As to the Promontory Prodigies, some of them are happening, but likely they do not mean what Casey thought

they might mean.”



Hanged folks swinging from a tree.
Hanging people, pray for me!

How Many Miles to Babylon

Finnegan seeks death and does not find it. That is the main point of his puzzling quest. His own fleece is named *thanato* and not *mallion*. Finnegan did *not* die in the ward in the hospital in the Philippines. But *somebody* died there in his name; and an army doctor friend of mine wrote me that Finnegan *did* die there *in his presence*, which letter I received the same day that Finnegan arrived in St. Louis. This amazed me, but it didn't seem to amaze Finnegan when I showed him the letter.

'Finnegan did not, apparently, die on the landing at Naxos, though X swears that there were not seven but eight bodies in that lantern-lit square on the cobbles, and that one of the bodies was Finnegan's. But X himself spent the latter part of that same week in Finnegan's company. A thing like that would not bother X, but it bothers me.

'Finnegan did not die in that very early encounter in the cabin of *Brunhilde*, but *someone* died there at the hands of Papadiabolous. Finnegan did not die at Tangiers with Don Lewis, though Marie Courtois believed that she had killed them both and left them together in the bottom of the *tell*.

("All I can say, Stein, is that I seem to remember these things differently," he told me in explanation the last time I saw him. "I don't remember getting killed any of those times, except for a very hazy impression of Papadiabolous bending down to kill me in the cabin of the *Brunhilde*. But that was before I came on to the *Brunhilde* that first time.")

'Finnegan did not die at the hand of Saxon X Seaworthy on Galveston Island, though Doll Delancy found (on West Beach) a body which she swears was Finnegan's; and Miss Delancy knew Finnegan. And possibly Finnegan did not die on the Marianao Coast near Havana. I believe, in spite of all

reports, that he is still alive. I also believe I have run athwart several tall-story artists, not the least of whom are that army doctor friend of mine, Doll Delancy, and Finnegan himself. But the death quest has always been there.

'Finnegan is a double *phougaro* or funnel, the link between several different worlds. Yet there are characters (X, Biloxi Brannigan, Doll Delancy, and others) who have verifiable existence in at least two of those worlds. Finnegan himself believed that he was subject to topographical inversion; he believed that one of the worlds was always interior to him and another one exterior, and that they sometimes changed their places. But where does that leave us who live in either of the worlds? Are we not sometimes reduced to being no more than items in the mind of Finnegan?

'Is the *Brunhilde* the first ship? Or the third? Is it the original *Argo*? Or is it a latter and unsanctified appearance of that ship, following the Barque in time? We have also the question of superimposed levels of experience in the Cruise of the *Brunhilde*. X says that not all the events of this voyage happened to Finnegan in the first decade of the interbellum period: he says that a strong substratum of them happened to Giulio Solli (the monster forgotten, the father of Finnegan) in the decade before World War One, and that Finnegan has filial memory of them. The atmosphere of that period *does* sometimes break in strongly on the voyage. But so much of our information depends on X who is not to be depended on.

'Carr states that the characters of the *Brunhilde* are not true archetypes. Why, then they are false archetypes, and these also have their being. Kidd believes that X himself is in the process of becoming the Third Evil to fill the void left by the insufficiency of Papadiabolous and Seaworthy in the roles of devils. But Kidd is Joycean. To complicate matters, Lafferty swears that Finnegan is in no way Joycean, that he is nine hundred years earlier, out of the Yellow Book of Lecan

(the Táin bó Cúailnge), a character out of the Tá. This presupposes that Finnegan is identical with Finn McCool as well as with the more derivative Fingal, and also with Cú Chulainn. Well, Finnegan is capable of being all. To those interested in this line I recommend Thurneysen's *Die Irische Helden- und Königsage*.

'I myself was present at several episodes (whether in the flesh or out of the flesh I do not know, God knows): I was present at one meeting of Don Lewis and Manuel of which Finnegan knew nothing, so this could not have come from his mind. I was present and watched them dine in death-like glitter on the Grand Canary, but I was unable to cross the room to them. John Schultz also experienced a rapport with one of the Brunhilde incidents.

'We are all of us in legend, of course. It is absolutely impossible that anyone should be in life who has not first been in legend. But no one of us understands his own legend. Mary Schaeffer says that I am the Wandering Jew, particularly in my writing style.

'I have not determined the exact and complete relationship of the Argo legend to the Finnegan Cycle.'

Notes on the Finnegan Cycle — Absalom Stein

Three unusual things happened on the same day.

The first unusual thing was the awakening (in his grave by the sounding sea) of a man who had either been dead, or in a time-stasis-undead, unalive- for several decades.

But first, many years before, there had been the picture.

In a walk-in art bijou in New Orleans, there is a large and sea-sounding picture named '*The Resurrection of Count Finnegan*'. The painting was received by the bijou's owner, Melchisedech Duffey, about the middle of the sixth decade of the twentieth century. It was at first considered to be a joke: but what a magnificent joke it was!

It was plain that it was painted by John Solli, believed by those able to judge these things well (about a dozen persons in the country) to be one of the greatest painters of the contemporary world.

This John Solli, who was widely known by his nickname of Finnegan, was reported to have been killed several years before the arrival of this painting. And nothing other than rumors had been heard of him in the interval.

But Solli-Finnegan was not a man who would accept death easily, and most of his old acquaintances had at least a tenth-part feeling that he was not dead and that he would return. Or they had the feeling that his body would yet be found. With the arrival of the magnificent painting, there bloomed the consensus feeling that Finnegan was indeed alive, and that this was his announcement that he would return to his old haunts.

"It has to be very recent," Margret Stone said about the painting. "He was good before, but he hadn't come this far. He couldn't have painted it before his death. It had to be since." Irish was about the only thing that Margret Stone was not, but she was full of blarney and malarky and bulls.

The painting was twelve feet by eight feet, and Count Finnegan and one other person were shown as life-sized. The painting was really two paintings separated by a schizogash. In the larger portion, the burial crypt seemed to be an ocean cave under a rock shelf; but now there was a fissure in the rock roof of the cave, and air and sunshine were pouring in. The half-risen Count Finnegan was partly in the dark-green water and partly in the bright-green air. There was a stark and horrible risenness about him. There were places on him where the flesh had fallen away from his bones as will sometimes happen when a person in either death or time-stasis is subject to an abrasion; and the under-the-rock-shelf water had apparently been abrasive. Count Finnegan was setting back into place one long strip of flesh that had fallen away from its bone, and he showed sure intent of repairing

other flesh damage and decay. He was identified by a Latin scroll there, as the Papal Count Finnegan. Finnegan-Solli had always been good at reproducing Latin scrolls.

The Count Finnegan in the picture seemed about thirty years older than the John Solli Finnegan would have been at the time of his reported death, which had been between two and three years before the time of the arrival of the painting at Melchisedech Duffey's New Orleans place. So it was a self-painting of Finnegan as it would appear twenty-five to thirty-five years in the future. "And that's mighty rough," said Absalom Stein who viewed the painting. "It could be Finn thirty years in the future, or three hundred." But the projection was clearly authentic. Nobody else but Finnegan could, with many years added to him, look so like this Count Finnegan in the picture.

Solli-Finnegan's big banana nose had acquired nobility and distinction on the Count in the picture. The flesh-mending hands of the pictured Count were even more intricate and talented than Finnegan's recent artist's hands which would be remembered by all who had ever known him. There was still the outrageous humor mixed with the warping pain and torture in the eyes. There was still the loose strength and speed of a yearling bullock, or perhaps a three-hundred-years-young bullock, on the Count in the picture. There was still the mouth in motion, and one had the feeling of soon being able to hear the multi-dialected words and spatting phrases from the painted Count. But there was an added texturing of the whole person that appears mostly in those who have risen from the dead. The flesh had suffered simultaneous transfiguration and corruption and was now in a state of violent incompleteness. There was a locality about the flesh change; partly it was the sea change of the un-coffined dead of the poor people of the West Indies. Count Finnegan was in the rags and tatters of what may have been a winding sheet. But there were solid but old clothes there for him to put on, travelers clothes.

There was another person in the picture who was as remarkable and powerful in appearance as was Count Finnegan. This person was standing just to the left of the fissure in the rock-roof of the burial cave, but this fissure also served as the schizo-gash that separated the Resurrection of the Count Finnegan from the Annunciation of Joseph Cardinal Hedayat. Joseph stood in the middle of a scene half a world away from the resurrection setting. The counterpart setting was a Syrian or Lebanese country scene. Joseph who had just received news or instruction or nomination, was identified in a scroll in Syrian Arabic as Joseph Cardinal Hedayat of Antioch.

"He is my kindred," said Margret Stone when she saw the Joseph in the painting the day it had arrived.

"Who isn't!" said Mary Virginia Schaeffer. "He was on TV just this past week. He may be the next chief of state of Syria in spite of his youth. But, ah, Finnegan has done something about Joseph's youth in this picture."

"Yes, it's the way Joseph will look in thirty years," Margret Stone said. "Or in three hundred."

"It is authentic," said Mr. X. who was present also. "I know him well, and the whole world has seen him pictured enough to know him on sight. Nobody in the world except this multi-geniused Joseph Hedayat could, with many years added to him, be the Joseph Cardinal Hedayat of this picture."

"That's true," said Duffey. "And yet it's clear fact that the Count Finnegan of the picture and the Joseph Cardinal Hedayat of the picture are of absolutely identical appearance."

"We will have to agree with that," Margret Stone said. "Yet, in their present (or recent) forms, Joseph and Finnegan do not look very much alike. Oh, they're both amply nosed, and they're about the same size and color. And they do move alike. But, really, they don't look anything alike."

"No, they don't," said X. "But Joseph, with many years added, has to look like the Joseph Cardinal Hedayat there."

However did that world-wide playboy and extraordinarily pleasant person become a cardinal?"

"And Finnegan, with many years added, has to be the Count Finnegan here. There is no other thing he could turn into," Mary Virginia said. "Oh, and they are absolutely identical. It's spooky. It's flesh crawling. It's flesh-falling-away-from-the-bones, that's the sort of feeling it gives one."

"This is a better picture than any of us realize," Duffey said. "It gets better by the minute. I would almost say that it changes by the minute. There are depths in it now that I would have seen an hour ago, if they had been there then. This is better even than Finnegan in his late orange period. I bet I can get twenty thousand dollars for it."

"That would be like selling Finnegan in the flesh," Mary Virginia said.

"And that would be like selling Joseph, flesh of my flesh, in the flesh," Margret Stone said.

"I knew them both in the flesh and I'd sell them both in the flesh for twenty thousand dollars for the two of them," Duffey said. "And I'd throw in my own mother too, though I never knew her in the flesh."

"Really, there must have been some contact," Mary Virginia joined him.

"No, there was not," Melchisedech Duffey insisted. "I didn't have a mother. I have another sort of origin."

Duffey sold the picture to Hilary Hilton of Chicago for twenty thousand dollars. Hilary had known Finnegan. And he knew Joseph Hedayat of Antioch. Hilton had done business with the Hedayat family. But Hilton, after he had bought the picture, decided to leave it hanging in Melchisedech's Walk-In Art Bijou in New Orleans.

"I could take it up home with me and enjoy it for thirty years I suppose," Hilary said. "And then I could bring it back here and give it a window on the day of the happenings. (Chicago will not be such a window.) But we know not the day nor the hour, and I wouldn't want it to miss the day. The

picture may have some role to play with its live counterparts."

But Hilary Hilton got to town at least once a year, and he used to come in and pull up a chair and gaze at the picture for an hour or more. "I wonder why I'm not in it," he said once. "I had intended to be here and take my bloody part in the events when they arrive. But Finnegan would have known it if I should have been in it. Maybe there are other pictures to be found. He paints better with his dead hand than with his live."

And Joseph Hedayat who traveled everywhere in the world (nobody knew why he did, but he made a delightful presence wherever he went) once saw the picture, and himself in it, looking much older. This was about five years after the arrival of the picture.

"I knew it existed, of course," Joseph said, "as any knowledgeable person will know of any new prodigy appearing in the world: but I would never expect to come on it here in the United States like this." (Joseph was then, still quite young, an ex-chief of state of Syria.) Then Joseph looked at the picture in sudden sorrow and fear. "*Páter, ei dynatón esti, parelthéto ap' emoú tó potírion toúto,*" he said, "Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass me by." But he didn't add "Thy will be done." He wasn't about to accept it. Not yet. But no great disaster was shown in the picture, except the disaster in the eyes of Joseph, and in those of Count Finnegan.

But one group, *The Unbelievers' Angry League For Style In The Universe*, hated the picture, and their railing against it shook Heaven and Earth. But none of the members of the *Angry League* had ever seen the picture.

For thirty years at least that picture hung on the walls of the Bijou in New Orleans, and nothing was heard of Finnegan, alive or dead. But finally the day of the happenings arrived.

The grave wasn't a formal one. The man may have been buried directly in the incrusting sand, or he may have been given directly to the sounding sea, or placed in the rock and sediment under the continental shelf to hide him. There was a fissure in the picture, and the sunlight through the fissure seemed to have awakened him. He was given a modified identity at his resurrection, but his brain had in no way been scrubbed of his old identity.

He was given (by an unknown giver) a coded assignment. His death of several decades before had been a cover or an alibi. Now he was given the role of Count Finnegan in an eschatological spy drama. And the other man of the fractured-off part of the picture, the new Cardinal Hedayat was also given a coded assignment.

The Papal Count Finnegan, half-risen now from either death or time-stasis, was partly in shadowy water and partly in bright air. He was in a water cave under a land shelf, but the cave had just been fissured by a land shock. He was replacing the rot and the falling-away of his flesh as best he could. There was a stench about him that had only vaguely been suggested by the picture of some decades before. He would not lose that stench.

There was an old rumor in the islands that Finnegan had not died *unconditionally* on the Mariano Coast of Cuba. The story was that he lived on a French island as a poor (and therefore mostly invisible) man, and that he came back once a year to lie awhile in that sea-cave on the Cuban Coast. He had married on the French Island and had had family there, this is the story. Could he not have done that at another time, before his death for instance? Men do have posthumous children, but to have children five and seven years posthumous is excessive.

Each year, it was said, Finnegan would swim into that underwater cave and lie there for three days. At fourth dawn he would ask "Is it yet?" and someone would answer "No, not yet." Then Finnegan would swim out of the cave and find

a boat somewhere and make his way back to his own island. And so he would be there for another year. When the answer should finally come "Yes, it is time now", that answer would be from a fissuring earthquake.

The island wife, Angela, had hinted that Finnegan was most times in his proper flesh, but that sometimes he was in ghost flesh, and at still other times he was in a leprous flesh which is akin to both the ghost flesh and the death flesh. Yes, the stench was leprous. It is the stench, at the same time sweet and horrifying, that most of the world has forgotten.

At the time of the awakening, there was a man standing on the flat shore above to kill the Count Finnegan when he should come up out of the fissured cave onto that rocky shore in the sunlight. This man, now grown much older and much more wicked, had known Count Finnegan long before this, had known him when he was called Count Finnegan only in fun and not officially. The man had not been wakened from a thirty year sleep to complete an unfinished murder on Finnegan. He had been doing many other evil things during that thirty years: and yet he had been doing them in a fractured sort of dream even if not in actual sleep. He did intend to complete an unfinished murder of Count Finnegan now.

And, thirty feet off the rock shelf, was a preternatural white shark that brought its own aura of electrical green water with it wherever it went. This shark intended to kill Count Finnegan if he should attempt to escape his human hunter by an underwater way. This shark also remembered Finnegan from more than thirty years back. They were old enemies. By one account, this shark had permitted Finnegan to pass in and out, once a year for thirty years, and had ground his shark's teeth in fury at it. Now he needn't permit anything to the Finnegan, surely not life.

Three hundred yards off the shore-shelf there was a boat with two riflemen in it. There were a lot of hunters here for a

single prey. But the prey, the Count Finnegan, had a lot of drollery left in him as well as warping pain. He sang out loud now with no attempt to hide his location:

"The hunters have the fish on gaff!
Hi! Ho!
The hunters have a hollow laugh.
They do not know their fish by half!
Hi Ho! The gollie wol!"

How did the Count Finnegan happen to know the Gadarene swine song? Well, according to one version, Count Finnegan was the son of Giulio the Gadarene swine himself. And the Count talked out loud, to himself and to his circling enemies:

"It's a role to challenge my talents," he said. "A man might wait a thousand years and not come onto so challenging a role as this. I am a masquerader, I am a spy, I am a sudden and mysterious person in a portentous flesh-and-soul drama. I will not spoil it all by letting myself be killed by such second-rate killers as these. I will break out of this and will play the double to the only transcendent man in the world for this time. Or it may be that the transcendent man will play the double to me."

The Count covered others of his bones with other pieces and strips of his flesh that had fallen away. He set the pieces carefully in place with his hands that were even more intricate and talented than when he was the great artist thirty years, or perhaps three hundred years, before. Then he made his move.

The shark struck in a white blur. The man on the stone shore above flung a grenade which exploded just under the surface. And then he flung a second and a third. There was a globbing of red blood up to the surface. It could have been either shark's blood or man's blood. There were chunks of torn-loose flesh coming to the shoaly surface, white flesh that was either ghost-shark flesh or leprous-man's flesh.

The riflemen in the boat three hundred yards off the shore shelf were firing. The grenade man dropped a heavier depth-charge, and then he slipped and followed it into the rioting water. And the water was stunned, and for a moment flattened, by the depth-charge. Then, as a secondary effect of the charge, it spouted. And a man spouted up with it. The riflemen in the boat, which had now moved in to less than fifty yards off the shore, riddled the man with shot. Another man, or the same man again, spouted up out of the spewing water, and was riddled with rifle shot again, and so he fell back.

And still it was possible that a man, making his move very swiftly and with his luck running like the shore-shelf water itself, could have gone under the surging shark when it was blinded by the whiteness of the depth-charged water, and could have gone under the motor-launch a moment later when it moved in through the bucking foam, and he might have been a quarter of a mile away and left two of his enemy dead.

It wasn't possible for very many men, but it was possible for one.

This little action took place on the Mariano Coast not far from Havana, Cuba.

The other man in the picture of a few decades before, had simultaneous experience half a world away. He wasn't put in immediate physical danger of his life, and he hadn't just recovered his life. But he received announcement that he was to become the only transcendent man in the world for his time, and that he could refuse this only on peril of his own damnation. This was Joseph Cardinal Hedayat, the look-alike of the reanimated Count Finnegan.

2

The second unusual thing to happen that day was a bell

being set to ringing on the North Coast of the small country of San Simeon. There hadn't been a bell there before ever, so far as anyone could remember. Then there had come an executive order stating that, on pain of death, no bell should be rung on that north coast. The order was inexplicable. No bell had ever rung there. There had been no bell to ring. But, within an hour of the publication of the executive order, a bell did begin to ring there, loudly and clearly.

San Simeon was a small country that was almost bereft of real resources. There was some maize culture and some fruit. The beans were good and the squash was fair. Goats were kept and a few pigs. No large cattle. The people dressed and were shod with woven grass. It was woven with fine style, and it was more sturdy than you might suppose.

There were stone houses, there were wooden houses, there were grass houses. Really the only shelter needed was roof from the rain (it rained torrentially but infrequently in most of San Simeon), and rock-hewn granaries for the beans and the maize to keep them from the rats.

San Simeon was the nesting ground for the giant bird named '*huracan*' or 'hurricane'. The birds (some said that there was only one of them that flies again and again; some say that there are a half-dozen of them hatched new every year) came out of certain limestone crags of central San Simeon where they nested, and flew over the Ocean of Mexico spreading destruction.

San Simeon had been a much larger country once. Pieces of it, large and small, are taken up by the hurricane bird every time it flies and are dropped into that water or onto other land by the storm bird in its twisting flight. At least thirteen islands of the Antilles are made out of these pieces of San Simeon that were dropped out of the twisting sky.

San Simeon was the richest country per capita in the world. Its wealth didn't lie in its maize or its beans or its grass-weaving industry, nor in its fowling or fishing, nor in its henequen or chicle growing; not in its mahogany or dye-

wood, not in its vanilla or rubber or sugar cane (all three of these were inferior), and not in its limestone quarries. Its wealth was in gold coins and in uncoined masses of gold. It was not in gold mining (there is none of that there, though all the neighboring countries have some gold mining), but only in the gold itself. The wealth isn't in the production but only in the possession.

There is only one gold coin in San Simeon. It is the San Simeon duro or fifty dollar gold piece. Once the world was flooded, for a very brief while, by these fifty dollar gold pieces. Now most of them are found only in San Simeon itself; and every man, woman, and child there has hundreds of them. A few more of them are stamped every year, at the Mad King's mint, and given to whatever people need them, mostly to infants born within the year just past. No one knows where the gold itself originally came from. If asked, the people of San Simeon wink and say '*de la estrellas*', 'from the stars'. This is a sort of joke-legend, but the existence of a great amount of gold is a fact.

The intersection of the two diagonals of the imperfect square whose four corners are New Orleans, Havana, Tegucigalpa, and Mexico City will come to a point right off the North shore of San Simeon. But, as the country is so small, this is a rough means of locating the country itself. San Simeon was also called Babylon. Nobody remembered the reason for this its ancient name.

San Simeon was ruled by a dynasty of Mad Kings, the Balbos. This line shines with clusters of geniuses, nor do the persons lose their genius when they lose their balance; they simply become mad geniuses. A prince of the line will grow up with his madness held in subjection, like a wild and powerful horse controlled by a strong hand. When the prince is nineteen years old, his father will become Mad King, and the prince will fare into the world to cut a swath there. He will immediately marry a princess of one of the seven acceptable families, and they will have a son.

The wife of the acceptable family will always die in childbirth, and the prince will not remarry. For that reason, there has never been a Queen in San Simeon.

With the aid of San Simeon gold duros, the prince will win high position in the intellectual world and in the glittering international community. He will set up foundations for the support of scientific and artistic activities and programs. He will be one of the dozen persons in the world to give it tone and style for two decades. Then the madness will take him over.

He will return to San Simeon to become the new Mad King. His father will become the Mad King Emeritus. His grandfather, who had been the Mad King Emeritus, will die. And his son the new prince will fare into the world to cut a great swath there.

So it had been with the Mad Kings Gaetano I, II, III, IV, V, VI. So it apparently would not be with him who had been born to become Mad King Gaetano VII. Instead of going mad when he reached the age of thirty-nine, the current Gaetano had become a high churchman (which some considered an act of another sort of madness), and he did not come home.

His father fretted at being forced to remain on as Mad King after his term should have run out, and his grandfather fretted at not being allowed to die until he could be relieved by another Mad King Emeritus.

San Simeon was surrounded by larger and more powerful neighboring countries, Campeche, Peten, Quintana Roo, Tabasco, and Yucatan Antigua. San Simeon survived as an independent country by paying gold tribute to these five powerful neighbors.

The poorest part of San Simeon was its North Coast. It was dry and scorched and stony land. Off North from the dry stony land were salt water swamps, and these merged with shoal water still further north. There was intermittent shoal water all the way from the North Coast of San Simeon to what are called the Campeche Banks — more than one

hundred kilometers. There was an inconsistency about these shoal waters in that much of their shoaling was from ghost shoals. There might be clear water many fathoms deep for league after league and day after day. And then those clear deep waters would turn into churning, shallow shoals.

With the rock shores and the salt swamps and the shoal waters, there were many desolate places in those northern regions that could hardly be reached at all by land or sea or air.

The governor of the northern province received a signed order from Mad King Gaetano VI forbidding, under pain of death for all concerned, any bells to be rung along that north shore.

"That is easily complied with," the governor said. "No bell has ever rung here. There has been no bell to ring."

Then he heard a bell off north between the salt water swamps and the ghost shoals, in one of those places that would be very hard to come to from any direction and by any means.

"I had forgot about that bell, or rather I didn't believe in it," the governor said, "but the tone is just how my grandmother used to describe it. It is named the 'Sea-Bell'. I will get soldiers and go and extinguish it: I'll be extinguished myself if I don't do so."

Both police and soldiers were sent with orders to stop the ringing and destroy the ringers. But these armed legal men could not, for a while, come up to the bell either by land or by sea. It was in a rough waste place. Shoal water appeared where it had never shoaled before. The coast guard cutters could not go through such shallows. Strong men went in rowboats that could float on even a thin dew, but fogs came and deceived both the eyes and the ears. It seemed that the bells were behind them, and then that they were in front. That first bell, the Sea Bell, was on a ship, and the ship was harried out of there for a while. It went through clear deep water, and there was always shoal water before and behind

it. And it shoaled in the clear deep water as soon as the ship had passed through.

Two days after it had begun to sound, the first bell, the 'Sea Bell', was joined by another clanging, booming bell (called the 'Martyr-Bell'). Two weeks later it was joined by a third bell (called the 'Peter-Bell').

In spite of all their efforts, the police and soldiers were never able to silence all three of these bells at one time. The bells were summoning bells, they were summoning certain persons to assemble. If everything went right with the bells, if everything went wrong with the police and soldiers, the assembly would be brought to be before the bells were silenced. One of the bells, or two of them, and much of the time all three of them, continued to clang and boom for a full three years. And every few months, another person would join the hidden assembly.

3

The third unusual thing that happened that day was the declaration of the termination, extinguishing, and dismantling of an institution that had lasted for about two thousand years. This institution was now called simply the 'Crowd' (Ekklesia, an Assembly, a Crowd), and it might no longer exist.

The Last Conclave was being held in Babylonia Bagascia, a town that had once been mistress of the world under another name. It had been a holy-unholy town that was almost without equal in its contrasts. Now the unholy element was in power, backed by a massive unholiness from outside. Whatever had been holy about the town was now either in hiding or in flight.

But sometimes there is a verve and variety in unholiness, and there were many sparkling people in town at the time of the Conclave. The Princes of the Crowd were popularly

known as 'Gates' (*Cardines*, Hinges, Swingers) or 'Stones'; they were assembling to disorganize and dismantle themselves for the last time. They had the votes to do it, but votes were an anachronism now. They had the power to do it, and power was still in contemporary use.

The mood of the Big Stones was a truculent one.

"Animosity?" said Efram Gate Gratz. "You're damned right we have animosity, total animosity. We've come to bury Peter, not to praise him. We will kill him and we will ritually defecate on his grave, and we will be certain that nothing like this ever happens again."

"Certainly we intended the building to fall when we removed the cap-stone," Howard Stone Ostwald said. (Some of the Princes used the 'Gate' and some used the 'Stone' in their names, but after today neither would be used as patents of nobility. But the titles and crests would still be used by some of them when working with their bands or doing their Talk Shows.) "We intend to remove *every* sort of cap-stone, and we intend for *every* building to fall down. Buildings divide people, and we have had enough of division."

Every effort had been made to save the Ekklesia, the Assembly, the Crowd, even to changing the name many times, but the weight of history was all against it. It had built-in structure, and the true crowd must be unstructured. After the nations were gone, it was felt that the Crowd still might be saved, as a sort of museum piece, if only it could be given a broad enough base. New Princes, Gates, Stones were created to represent various broad bases. There were Gates and Stones of Labor and of the Media. There were Gates of the various rites of Freemasonry and Jewry. There were Gates of the Pentecostals and Roarers and Teilhardians, of the Gays and the Hot Brains and the Levelers. There were Gates of the various instrumentalists: Hornmen and Drummers had special Gates to represent them, and the electric guitarists had five Gates of their own. There were

special Stones for the Trippers and the Dippers, for the Mushroomers and Hash-Bashers, for the old time Drunkards and for the Fundamentalist Drunkards. There were thirteen Stones for the Media groups, and sixteen for the Labor people. The Zero Growth lobby was represented. Everything was represented. It hadn't worked. The Crowd, the Assembly was finished, but it wouldn't die with dignity. Well, maybe it would die if it had its head cut off.

The decapitating had happened the day before the opening of the conclave. Conclaves have never been called for any reason other than to treat of the condition of headlessness, to erect a new Cap-Stone for one that has fallen, or (as in this case) to declare a Cap-Stone suppressed.

The Cap-Stone himself (He was Paul the Eleventh in the listing of the Cap-Stones) had been decapitated the day before. Then his head had been put up on a pike at the Spanish Stairs where people could see it as they came and went. The head was not dead for quite a while. It could talk and answer questions, though in a tortured tone. Several times it cried in a miserable and snuffling sort of way. People came and stood on the little ladder there and pulled all the hair out of the head in bloody gouts.

Several ladies asked their bravos to bring them pieces from the head for souvenirs. The bravos broke out the teeth and gouged out the eyes for their lady friends. But still the head was able to talk, and even to get a little the best of its tormentors in argument and discussion.

One of the Stones climbed the little ladder there and cut out the Cap-Stone's tongue. He took it into a little *caffè* there to have it grilled for eating. The head wept in a grotesque gurgling way after its tongue was cut out. Then a fire-tongue came down, and the Cap-Stone talked for a while in his own voice with the fire-tongue. He fell silent only when several of the Gates came and broke open his skull and scraped his brains out. They took these and fried them with

onions to eat. The Cap-Stone was silent after that, and perhaps he was dead.

All that was a sort of prodigy, but prodigies were quite common in Babylonia Bagascia that week. It was believed that the Ekklesia was ended with the destruction of the head of that last Cap-Stone. The Conclave would only confirm the end of it.

Well, the Conclave, the declared last one of them, would be very broad-based. All the Gates and Stones in the world were present there except for a stubborn thirteen of them. These thirteen were darkness men who refused to face the light and the reason of an open conclave. But everything else in town was compounded of light and reason. The week's entertainment preceding the Conclave was as light and as reasonable as it was possible to make it, and as authentic. Dancing girls, dancing men, dancing whatevers. Laced wine, and stratified noise building up like layered rock over the city.

There was a special freedom-and-looseness festival every day of the week, and the Voltaire Festival was on the final day and night before the Conclave. It was named for the Father of Reason and was to commemorate his three hundredth birthday as well as the final realization of everything that he had stood for, save for a few unfulfilled trifles here and there. This father of reason had once expressed the desire that he might see the last king strangled with the guts of the last priest. What more apt than to enact this thing!

"How do we *think* of these things!" cried the marshal of the festival. "We're amazing."

So they woke up Voltaire and set him in a chair to watch it on the last evening of the festivals. Dead? No, the man hadn't been dead. Death wouldn't have him. Death had curled a fleshless lip in scorn and turned away. Death is pickish. So the man had gone into a senility stasis and had

been nearly forgotten in his person in the very centuries that his works were fruiting so magnificently. Oh, it would be a charming strangulation that would be presented for him and for everyone!

The last king was Hiram III of the small kingdom of St. Kobarid in the Julian Alps, and Hiram was in Babylonia Bagascia that very week. And he was a man surrounded by all the consensus hatreds. He had defied the order of the World Consensus General to abolish his nation, and so he still ruled over the only unabolished nation left in the world. Nor could the nation be abolished till late springtime when the snow plows would be able to enter it and break a road for the armed dismantlers and terminators.

And Hiram had otherwise disgraced himself. For one thing, he had gotten into a fist fight with a 'Highly Honored' Television prince. The public shock at one of the 'Highly Honored' category being struck by such a ruffian as Hiram was overwhelming, and sky-writers were impelled to build scarlet cloud signs asking 'Is Nothing Sacred?'. It seemed that nothing was to Hiram III.

An even more shocking thing happened. At the Colossal Noisearama Itself, Hiram had begun to yodel very loudly (he had captured a central section of the amplification system with several of his sheriffs) at one of the most solemn and intense moments of a Rock Movement. Oh, he broke it! He was marked for death from that moment.

And Hiram III had quipped back at Otto Glotglutz the sick night-club comedian. The suddenness and unlikelihood of this had sent Glotzie (as he was known to the sick world over) into tears. The thunderstruck observers could only call "Shame! Shame!"

And Hiram had refused to contribute to a cash benefice to World Labor Czar Poot Plambert on Poot's being voted the World's Most Beloved Man of the Year. "Not to me he's not the most beloved," Hiram had said crudely. So the life of

Hiram III wasn't worth a lead lire around Babylonia Bagascia anyhow.

The last priest in the world had, hopefully, been Paul the Eleventh (who was the last Cap-Stone or Top-Peter also); Paul's head was still on a pike by the Spanish Steps, and his guts were still warm and pliable. So the great thing was presented to the Voltaire Festival at prime time that night. It was (this was the judgment of all knowledgeable observers) more fun than catching a greased pig.

And it was somewhat similar. For, of course, the entrails of Paul the Eleventh were well-greased for the spectacle. They were long, and they were slick! A picked team of fifty senior youths from the Senior Youth World Congress was to perform the exquisite garroting.

They had been having a hard time waking Voltaire up and keeping him awake. But, once he understood that it was one of his highest desires really being presented for him, he was able to stay awake pretty well; and he cackled and carried on like a person a hundred and fifty years younger than himself.

But it takes a long time to strangle a man with entrails as slick as those were. Fourteen choruses of Grave-Stone Rock were done while it was going on, and one of those choruses can't be done in less than ten minutes. Even with a good loop around the last royal neck in the world, and with twenty-five select senior youths tugging and lugging on each entrail length, it was hard to do a quick job with such a greasy hawser. But, really, a quick job hadn't been what was desired. It was slow, and the face of Hiram III turned every rainbow color during the presentation.

It was an entertaining two-and-a-half or three hours. But Hiram III was finally dead and his body was given over to the dismemberers and souvenir seekers. And the Father of Reason was permitted to go back to sleep again. And then, since the Pauline entrails were now just well warmed up, and all possible fun had already been had out of Hiram III, it was

decided to act out another drama in a nearby basilica or holy place, the largest of them. The theme of this new presentation was an old saying about Wild Beasts Devouring Entrails in the Holy Places. For this, the winning team of fifty persons from the Consenting Adults' World Congress (this team had just eaten the world's longest hot dog, fifty meters long, in three minutes, and was ready for anything) was assembled and instructed. And they began the devouring.

But they had almost bit off more than they could chew in this case. The entrails were tough and they were rubbery. They were slick and they were uncleansed. It was something of a circus to watch it all, the look on the faces of the chewers when they could not get a good bite. The even more contorted look on their faces when they could. Paul the Eleventh had been a tough old man, and the uncleansed entrails of tough old men have a very gamey taste to them. But the Consenting Adults were used to doing just about anything, and finally they were able to do this. Finished them off, they did, and hardly a scrap left of them. Who would ever forget the bright week of the Festivals, and especially that final bright day and night of the Voltaire Festival! Novelty piled upon novelty, and all was novelty!

So the Conclave began at dawn on a pleasant note. It didn't take much furniture or equipment for the Conclave. A straw-man, soaked in lamb's blood, was prepared. This was important, but it was not elaborate. The straw-man was called the Master of the Conclave. Very broad based offerings were made so that no cult might be neglected. Incense was burned to the Media Mega-Net, the only thing holy remaining in the world. Goats were sacrificed to the Left Lectionary League. Money offering was made to the Unilateral Workers' League, and their Mammon statue was enthroned there. A kilo of hash was given to every person in Babylonia Bagascia ('Hash and Circuses' had always been big in that town). Nine men and nine women came up

voluntarily to offer their near-spent lives for the Euthanasian Demonstration Agency under the big agency flag (with the motto 'See How Easy It Is') flying there. A dozen children, babes, infants, and quick foetuses from three years old on down were brought there and cast into the Moloch Furnace in offering to Moloch and his Molochites.

One of the quick foetuses spoke in a small but clear voice from the blasting-hot furnace, and said that he was Little Hugh of Lincoln. And everybody laughed. And hot-rock harpers were playing their traditional music there around the portals of Conclave Hall.

Then the crowd was put out, and only the six hundred and sixty-six Princes of the Ekklesia (the Gates, and the Stones, as most of them called themselves) were left in the hall: and one other person, the mysterious old Monsignor X was there to serve them. Only thirteen of the Princes, from all of those in the world, were missing.

But these high delegates were not really walled up in the hall. Only one course of bricks was laid along the bottom of the big door to the Conclave Hall, and that was only for token. The Top Gates and Stones had said that they would be out again in a very few minutes, just as soon as they had had a roll call, burned the effigy, and made the avowals and denials. Then, as soon as they were out, the Conclave Hall would be taken down.

"I will lead the ceremonies," said Conrad Stone Hackenschmidt of Weinsburg in the Germanies. "There are six hundred and sixty-six of us Princes of the Ekklesia present, and one curator, Monsignor X. He is our servant. You know, X, that the quality of a good servitor can be gauged by his ability to anticipate a need. I have need now for a submachine gun. Have you anticipated my need in this?"

"No, I have not, Eminent Prince and Stone," Monsignor X said.

"Then you are an inefficient servitor, Monsignor X, and I will have to do away with you."

"No I am not," said Monsignor X, "and no you will not. For several reasons, this is better." And Monsignor X produced from his multi-trapped and multi-pocketed cassock a fire-weapon called the Browning Automatic Rifle or the BAR. And he handed this to Conrad Stone Hackenschmidt.

The BAR is a curious weapon. It fires so rapid a burst that it can cut a man in half, but it tends to rise straight up when a burst is fired. For this reason, a practical man will let out the leather sling to its greatest length and will stand on that sling with his right foot. Conrad Stone Hackenschmidt did so. He had the whole company covered by the weapon, and he addressed that whole company in his tough and bright German-silver voice.

"There is only one way to vote. When I call your name, you will say '*Ego eligo effigiem*' or 'I vote for the effigy or straw-man'. So we will elect the straw-man to be Cap-Stone or Top-Peter of the Ekklesia. Then we will burn the straw-man in the stove, and the red smoke will pour out of the chimney for all the people to see. By that, they will know for certain that the only Papist is the StrawPeter or Struwwelpeter. So it will be finished.

"Casper Stone Aaron," Hackenschmidt began the roll call of the Princes.

"*Ego eligo effigiem*," Casper Stone Aaron spoke, but a bit surly as though he were under compulsion. "I elect for the Straw-Man."

"Catherine Stone Abbott."

"*Ego eligo effigiem*."

"James Gate Abdo."

"*Ego eligo effigiem*."

So the roll call went for a while. Then —

"Stockton Stone Crocker."

"*Ego eligo Joseph Cardinalem Hedayat ab Antiochia*." "I elect for Joseph Cardinal Hedayat of Antioch." There was

some very quick scurrying around there, and Stockton Stone Crocker found himself standing alone with all the other Princes of the congregation drawn back from him on either side like Red Sea waters. Hackenschmidt fired an eviscerating blast with the BAR, and Stockton Stone Crocker lay dead on the flagstone floor.

"Sic semper zannionibus," (thus ever to buffoons or zanies), Hackenschmidt quipped. "Next. Rosemary Gate Cruikshank."

"Ego eligo effigiem," said Gate Cruikshank. So it went on through the whole roll. Six hundred and sixty of the Princes, Stones, and Gates voted for the Straw-Man, and six of them voted for Joseph Cardinal Hedayat of Antioch. The six zany votes were rectified to count all for the Straw-Man.

"The Straw-Man is the Cap-Stone of the Ekklesia, the Peter of the Church," Conrad Stone Hackenschmidt said. "But the Straw-Man is made of temporal straw, and he is gone with one blast of the stove-fire. Monsignor X, servitor, put the effigy into the stove."

And Monsignor X did so, and immediately there was a profusion of red smoke in the Conclave Hall, and there was ten times as much of that red smoke going up the chimney. Blood-red rain began to fall inside the building, and much more of it could be heard rattling against the roof and into the streets outside. And a veritable stream of blood ran out of the stove and began to flood the floor of the hall. The Straw-Man had been soaked in the blood of a lamb yes, but ten thousand lambs would not have had this much blood in them.

"This fetish-ritual gets a little bit out of hand," Stone Hackenschmidt said. "That is a weakness of fetishes. So much blood is almost awkward. Well, pitch the six bodies into the stove, Monsignor X, servitor. Their blood and flesh and smoke won't add much more to what we already have."

Monsignor X pitched the six bodies into the stove, and the blood and smoke were not noticeably increased.

“Now, all of you present,” said Hackenschmidt, “make your avowals and denials.”

All persons present did so with a sincere mumbling. This was a formula thing, a ritual thing, but it was no less necessary.

“Several other small things ere we part,” Hackenschmidt said then. “We are princes no longer. There is nothing left for us to be princes of. The Thing is Dead: but let me give you a small caution about its deadness. Every bell in the world must now be broken and melted. The thing is dead. But the horoscopist of the Conclave has quoted an old saying about bells pealing until they wake up the dead. This must not happen. The thing is dead. The bells everywhere must be made dead so that they will not call or awaken anyone ever again. And the horoscopist, I am glad to say, is dead.

“ ‘He was only doing his duty,’ you say. Very well. He has done it. And now his duty is to be dead.”

The ex-princes, taken by a sort of unease, were shuffling and getting ready to get out of that place and have it all ended.

“One other thing,” Hackenschmidt said then. “There are thirteen princes who are not with us, and one of them is Joseph Cardinal Hedayat. There are prophecies about him. We declare all these prophecies to be void. We declare the thirteen princes to be no longer princes. We declare them to be dead men. But this latter part will take a little bit of physical effecting. Some of you are more experienced than I am in this. Has anyone any favorite firm we might give the contract to?”

“ ‘Track and Total’ is a dependable firm,” one new-made common man there said. “They will track down any person whatsoever, and they will total that person. And they will do it quickly and neatly. ‘Dog and Destroy’ is another good firm. They have dogged down some of the most difficult cases. But I believe that ‘Track and Total’ is the best.”

“Very well,” said Hackenschmidt. “We will give ‘Track and Total’ the contract to hound down and kill the thirteen men. And we will pay a bonus for quick dispatch in this matter.

“And there is still one more thing. One does not leave the Servitor of the Final Conclave alive behind one. Monsignor X, stand over by the stove to save us a little trouble in disposing of you.”

“No, man,” said X. “I have you covered. And you will find that you can not turn fast enough with a BAR, not when you are standing on the sling.”

“Why did you lie to me, Monsignor X, and say that you did not have a submachine gun?” Hackenschmidt asked, and he was deeply hurt by what he believed was a deception. “I see that you do have one.”

“I did not lie,” said X. “I said that I hadn't anticipated your need for this weapon. But I had anticipated my own need for it. I go now, and do not follow me. I will follow you whenever I wish. I will work for you sometimes. Sometimes I will work for the thirteen princes who are not here. And sometimes I will work for ‘Track and Total’. Could anything less than a triple agent be worthy of my talents?

“Ah, when I have lived and adventured through it all, it will make a wonderful tale. In times to come, when I tell this tale, that is to say, in times past when I have told this tale, I'll make it good even if part of it has to be made up. That is to say, I have will have had (pardon me, people, the tense is a difficult one in my case) — in the past time when I someday will have told it, I will have told it with fine ornamentation.”

X went out with the submachine gun somewhere in his many-trapped and many-pocketed cassock. It was really a magician's cloak, that cassock. Did you know that, when he used to be in vaudeville, Mr. X had been billed as the Great Ex-Capo?

X escaped from Babylonia Bagascia or Whore Babylon in an old oak-wood sail-ship that had once been named the

Brunhilde, that had once been named *Navicula Petri*, and had several times been named the *Argo*.

4

It was an All-Universe Congratulation by the *Unbelievers' Angry League For Style In The Universe*: "Perfect, perfect were all the terminations in Babylonia Bagascia, total style, with never a hint of grossness or corn. May the Ungodly Oaf sitting on his three-legged stool in the Sign of the Fish swallow his beard in frustration." That's telling them, Angry League.

One termination that was hardly noticed was the ancient grass with the incredibly long roots and the trace of red in its green that had always grown on Vatican Hill and nowhere else in the world. It had yielded to men with blow-torches, as it had never yielded to them before. And now it would never grow on Vatican Hill again. It was named *Herba Cruor Martyrum* or Blood-of-Martyrs Grass, and it was finished there.

X made contact with the 'Track and Total' Mogul. The Mogul had passed three of his own always-alert guards on the way it. Then he entered his own impregnable apartment, turned on the lights in the inner room (this was at two o'clock in the morning), and he saw X sitting there, smoking one of the Mogul's cigars and drinking the Mogul's claret.

"Be at ease," said X. "I am looking for employment. You have, this week, received a contract for thirteen items or persons to be demolished and terminated. I know all about it. I believe you should sub-contract it to me. I am a hungry hunter and I will not let any prey escape me."

(This was in Marseille in France. It was several days after X had left Babylonia Bagascia in Italy.)

"Who are you?" the Mogul asked.

"X."

"So I half-suspected. But, X, you have the name of being a butterfly, long on talk, and short on blood."

"I say that if a man sheds one more drop than is necessary, then he hasn't the fine edge for such work."

"I, I'm a little partial to blood myself, X. And a little partial to all excesses. But I haven't any place for you. I have several showy tricksters in my organization already. They are amusing, but I am a grown man who doesn't need to be amused all the time. You do not have me here, X. I have you. Did you believe that I had only static guards? No, I also have fast-moving slammers. In fifteen minutes, one of them will come through that door, and I will give you to him to do as he will. You have meddled here, X. That costs you your life."

"This will be close, Mogul. But I believe that I can bring it about that another man will come through that door before your slammer comes. And the first man who comes will be one of the thirteen men you wish. Choose the least likely, the least possible one. Pick any one of those thirteen men who are scattered so widely through the world. Name the one you want me to bring here, and I will cause him to walk through that door within ten minute's time. Which one do you want to see, Mogul?"

"Why, in these last few minutes of your life, are you fishing in that rain barrel, X? You do not know the names of *any* of the thirteen. It is only by some accident that you know there are thirteen men put under death contract. What good will it do to your butterfly ego to learn even one of the names? You're an odd little one, X, but I have plenty of odd ones now."

"The thirteen men on whom you have kill-contracts are these," X said:

"Joseph Cardinal Hedayat of Antioch.

"Terrance Cardinal of Cork

"Edward Cardinal Leviathan of Edinburgh

"Carlos Cardinal Artemis of Santa Cruz

"David Cardinal Lloyd-Spencer of Cardiff

“Henri Cardinal Salvatore of New Orleans

“Nicholas Cardinal Gregorio of Messina

“Xavier Cardinal Runosake of Kobe, Japan

“Kirol Cardinal Gabrailovitch of Zagreb

“Joseph Cardinal Doki of Douala

“Martino Cardinal Erculo of Milan. These are the thirteen, Mogul. Name me the one of them you wish and I will have him here within, ah, nine minutes now.”

“You are called on that, X. As if any of them would come to this door when the word is already out (it must be out if even a butterfly like you has heard it) that I have the contract! There are several of these that we haven't quite pin-pointed as to location yet, and several of them have gone into panic travel, but we watch them closely. But I do know where Xavier Runosake is. At the moment he is billeted with a group of Buddhists in his own Kobe. We will kill him there, of course, but we intend to wait a day or two until implanted rumor has cut him down a little further. I hate to kill a public man when he is still partly in the public favor. But there is no need to kill him in favor since any man can so easily be turned out of that favor. X, I pick Xavier Cardinal Runosake of Kobe, Japan. And you will bring him to my very door in a little less than nine minutes, will you, X? Or will you prefer to be killed by my slammer here two or three minutes after that.”

“I prefer to bring Runosake here. But he *isn't* in that little Buddhist compound of Kobe, not right now. He has just escaped. I tell you this to be fair with you.”

The Mogul (that sounded like a nickname for the head of ‘Track and Total’ but the man was really named John Mogul and was usually called ‘The Mogul’) picked up a phone and finger-tapped a call. Calls from Europe go through quickly at that time of the night. The Mogul spoke a few words and listened to a few words. Then he replaced the phone.

“Yes, he escaped the compound not more than ten minutes ago,” The Mogul said, “but he can't have escaped

from Kobe yet. And you will have him at my door in another eight minutes? X, if he were in Marseille, he could not get here from the airport in less than one hour. But my Japanese operative said that he had already given me the news of the temporary escape, X. He said that he had given it to me about seven minutes ago."

"It was about that, Mogul, yes."

"So you had already entered my apartment then. You took the call in my name and voice. But that wouldn't get the Cardinal a third of the way around the world in almost no time at all. And why, of all the doors in the world, should he come to my door?"

"We will see. Will you know Cardinal Runosake if you see him, Mogul?"

"I know him, yes. Whenever or wherever I see him I will know him. How does it feel when you come right up to the edge of your life, little meddler? You will end not with a bang but with a riddle, eh? But does it not make you a little giddy when you come to the edge of it and look over?"

"It does, Mogul. I have looked over that life brink many times and been giddy every time. If I do bring the Japanese Cardinal to your door in just these couple of minutes, then will you sub-contract the thirteen-part job to me?"

"Not quite. But I'll take you in on it. I will pay you the first princely fee if you do deliver this prince of the congregation to my door. No, I have put the thirteen out on separate contracts, but I can pull any contract when I wish. If you deliver this Cardinal (I'm talking here almost as if it were possible) then I would put out one other contract to you. And, if you were successful on it, I would put out another to you. After all, you can't kill more than one of them at a time, can you?"

"Yes."

"I can't figure out just what your angle is, X. Unsatisfied curiosity eats me up sometimes. Be a good fellow, X, and tell me what your angle is, before you die."

"Yes. I'll probably tell it to you before I die. Maybe I'll tell it to you, someday, just before you die. But I won't die today."

"I believe that you *will* die today, X," John Mogul said. "I'm a man who is not known to the public. I am a quiet and effacing man. Really, I do efface a lot of people in the course of a year. And I fill a necessary niche. I am a trashman and I do my trashman's part to keep our world and society cleansed. I am a knacker, a dealer in carcasses. We turn their corruptible material, whenever such disposition is possible, into quality soap and essential oils and bone-meal for the farmer. I am a euthanasiast who removes unwanted persons from a world where everyone should be wanted. In each case, there is *someone* who does not want these persons they put out to contract, so I am doing my part to make this a completely wanted world. But I do not like passionate killers, and I seldom keep more than two or three of them in my stables. They are useful tools sometimes, but I use them with distaste. Coolness and dedication are the things I most like, and the personal satisfaction in jobs well done."

"Your several guards are coming back from the cantina on the corner now, Mogul, after that fine late drink; and your guard just outside that door has gone to sleep. But a usually reasoned and collected man has moved up to this level of the building, but he's in a state of dull confusion. He moves with cranky steps, and he's near collapse. His feet are even now at the door. Do you hear him?"

"I hear him. But he is not my two-fifteen slammer. Who can he be?"

"I told you who he would be," X said. "I win the wager. And now you will pay a princely fee on this first dead prince. And then we will agree to certain verbal contracts, and we will share certain other information."

"It cannot be that," the Mogul said. "I would know his face if it were he. I will not be taken in by any of your skittish

tricks. Why doesn't my guard outside the door stop him? It's like a dead man stalking."

"Certain peoples do sometimes stalk several steps after they're dead. I told you that your guard outside the door had fallen asleep."

X and the Mogul had been speaking in Frioul. Really, there are hardly a dozen such neutral languages left which two men of their experienced sort will know and feel easy to discuss in. All others have certain trammels and connotations.

The door was fumbled open. A man, frozen-faced and dully horrifying, quite large for a Japanese, staggered in. He tottered there for a moment. Then he fell forward at full length. There was a knife hilt between his shoulders. There were other weirdly misplaced things about him.

"He's quite dead," said X. "Shall I turn him over? Did you get a good enough look at his face?"

"I got a good enough look at his face," the Mogul said. "He is Cardinal Runosake."

Much later that morning, John Mogul, a man of some vestigial religion, had a stone cut for Runosake with the words "—but others, save them, snatching them from the fire."

Then the Mogul raised his hands over his head with their twelve digits extended. The Mogul had, on each hand, five fingers and one thumb. This extradigitalism was common in the Mogul family. John Mogul was indicating that he still had twelve men on contract to be killed.

5

The business of the bells on the North Coast of San Simeon continued. The main hope, or the main fear, was that it would be widely known that the bells were ringing there, or that they had rung there. A growing legend of the bells

would play havoc, and havoc is a two-handed game. It is very hard to keep a noise about bells quiet. Even if all this North Coast's bells were silenced at one time (and, so far, they had not been) there would still be the spreading rumor that bells had rung at this place, and that they were summoning bells.

There hadn't ever been bells on that North Coast before, but there had been bells further out, among the ghost shoals. There had been subliminal bells and submarine bells there, for near five hundred years now, just beneath the level of human hearing and just beneath the level of human breathing: sunken-ship bells, sunken-city bells, sunk promontory bells. The bells of the thirteen hundred Spanish and French ships that had sunk in those waters during the maritime centuries were not necessarily silenced. Bells do ring underwater. All sea creatures, from plankton to porpoises, enjoy these water-buried bells. Porpoises and dolphins love bells; they can be talked to by coded bells.

Hundreds of the sunken ship bells have been raised, by fishermen, by private persons, by beachcombers, and set up on stanchions on small reefs and on small islands, so that has always been a musical ocean, up in the Antilles and Indies. Now the booming bells off north of San Simeon gave real authority to what had been a vague chorus, and gave a world-wide call to assemble at a certain place.

It was Count Finnegan who brought the second bell, the Martyr-Bell to the shoal region to join the Sea-Bell. This was two days after the Sea-Bell had first begun to boom. He brought the bell, on a log raft towed by a motor skiff, to a particular mooring-rock. They set it up there on stone stanchions so that the whole mooring rock and stony-bottomed sea thereabouts boomed and pealed with the rocking bronze giant.

The mooring-rock was six hundred yards by three hundred yards. There was a rock-hewn fresh water well there. It was a shaft, ten feet square, that had been cut into

the solid and unfissured rock for a cistern to catch rain water; but fresh water had welled up into it from the bottom when it was dug to one hundred feet. And the fresh water had not failed. The shaft had been dug about one hundred years before this.

The mooring-rock was built like a long bowl, with a high ring around it, twice the height of a man. This ring was like a palisade, and the low tide and surf there never broke over it. Inside the palisade, the rock was just about sea level. Parts of it were under two or three feet of water (of fresh water from the rain, not sea water) and parts of it were bare to the sun. For about a hundred and fifty years, people had been bringing soil to this mooring rock, soil taken from islands or parts of the main, or soil dredged from the muddier and more organic parts of the sea. People had built garden plots there which no one could see from the ocean. The ocean-view appearance was of barren rock. These were not large garden plots, for the whole mooring-rock was only about forty acres in extent; but probably fifty people now had permanent homes on that piece of rock, and several hundred people (sharing the secret of this secluded place) moored there at some time during the year. The mooring-rock could only be come to by certain passages through the shoals, and a stranger would leave his wreckage and his bones there before he found a passage by himself.

At least three millionaires were secret sharers in this place and came in season for the deep-sea fishing and the ocean seclusion. Every sort of fisher people came there. Two different tramp-steamers visited the place, one of them four times a year, one of them times a year. But they didn't advertise the place to unworthy ears.

And Count Finnegan had been here before, in his youth, quite some several decades before this. Now Count Finnegan had brought the Martyr-Bell from Ste. Genevieve. The rock people took it and rigged it up and set it to booming on their

rock. This was about seven miles from where the Sea-Bell had begun to boom two days before.

And the Ship-Bell, which was onboard a small ship and not land stanchioned, began to move about; and the Martyr-Bell stood fast, but seemed to move (from the tricky sound-carrying winds in the neighborhood). This confused the soldiers who were set to the task of extinguishing the bells. The soldiers swore that both of them were ghost bells.

It had been in the year 1594 that English raiders in the service of the Queen had come to the Island of Ste. Genevieve and had murdered thirty-nine Christian people of color who had refused to abjure their faith. Thereupon the English ship, the *Lord Cramner*, had been shipwrecked on a shoal only nine sea miles from Ste. Genevieve, and all aboard had drowned. Several bronze cannon of the *Lord Cramner* had then been raised by people of Ste. Genevieve and brought to their island. The bronze had been cast into the Martyr-Bell. The bell was set up to seaward. For four hundred years it rang of itself whenever Englishmen or other enemies of the Faith approached the island.

Then one day, some people of the Island (in the spirit of prophecy) went out and intercepted Count Finnegan who was going down ocean in a speed launch. Some of the old men of them remembered Count Finnegan from their childhoods, but now he was younger than they were. Count Finnegan said that he would do whatever they asked him to do; he said that he had been searching and listening for Prophetic Instruction, and that he felt that the very air and sea around him were crackling with such instruction now. The people told him the history of the bell and they told him he was to take it South to a place he would know. It was to be set up there and set to pealing an invitation to good people to come, not a warning to evil people to stand off. So Count Finnegan towed the bell to the mooring rock in the shoal water north of San Simeon. And once it was set up there, it rang for three years at least.

At mooring rock Count Finnegan asked old men about a room or cave, down in the rock and below sea level, that he remembered. It could be reached, he recalled, by a sort of passage from the hewn well-shaft. Count Finnegan said that, as well as he remembered, it was a room large enough to hold fifty people. Now the whole interior of the well-shaft was grown with wonderful green vines till it was an absolute joy to look at. But was the passage to that subterranean room still known, or was it forgotten behind the vines?

Oh, it was still there, the old men said, but it hadn't been used for a very long time. The passage and the room would be used again when there was a special reason for their use, and not before.

Count Finnegan sold the speed launch to a rich man who was on the rock. Then he took passage on the tramp steamer that came there twice a year and had come there now. He went away on the tramp, listening intently for more Prophetic Instruction.

It was two weeks later that the Peter-Bell was brought to the mooring rock. It was brought there in a ship that was actually named the *Argo*; the name was painted boldly in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and Chaldee letters. This was a sail-ship, but it approached the mooring rock at swift speed and exactly against the wind, and its sails billowed out full and evenly against the wind, corning in contrary direction. It was square-sailed and had no lateen or coastwise sail at all.

The man on the *Argo* (only one man was to be seen there) had his face covered with a golden scarf or veil or mask with eye-slits in it. He said that his veil mask was made from combings of the Fleece itself, that the original fleece of Colchis can have gold tufts combed out of it and not be diminished by their loss.

The man said that he had brought one of the nine hundred and ninety-nine Peter-Bells from St. Peter's in Rome. And he unloaded it with his ship's boom. Then the man gave the people on the rock some flat unleavened

bread or ship-biscuit from the Black Sea, and red wine which he said was from the Persian Sea.

The man went away again in the same direction from which he had come. The wind had shifted around by then, and he once more went with full sails and at great speed directly against the wind.

In the month that followed, the people obtained and put up about a hundred more bells along the limestone north coast of San Simeon, and in its salt swamps and outcroppings and islets in all the shoal waters as far as Campche Bank and Perez Island.

6

John Mogul, the chief of 'Track and Total', held up his hands with six digits extended on one of them and five on the other, to indicate that eleven of his primary targets were left alive and two of them were dead. He recited a little verse that was both a crowing and a prediction, and rope-jumping children in West Chicago and in Surabaya Java had it instantly, each group in its own tongue:

Eleven little fuzzy cubs
Hiding in a den.
The head of one goes bouncing off,
And then there are ten.

This was dedicated to Ignatius Cardinal Ti, the next in line for destruction, to indicate what death he should die. The second Prince in Hiding who had been killed was Kirol Cardinal Gabrailovitch of Zagreb. John Mogul, as a man of vestigial religion, had put up a monument stone to this Prince with the carven words: "One of these must be made a witness with us of His resurrection."

John Mogul was, very slightly, worried about the 'doubles' of the Princes. He had them all identified now, but he did not

have them dead. These were the doubles:

Of Joseph Cardinal Hedayat of Antioch, Count Finnegan (full name and birthplace not known).

Of Paul Cardinal Brokenbolt of Freemantle, Australia, Cecil Octavian of England.

Of Ignatius Cardinal Ti of Manila, Bolo Manolo (place of residence not known).

Of Terrence Cardinal Merry of Cork, Emmet Collins of Boston, Massachusetts.

Of Edward Cardinal Leviathan of Edinburgh, Douglas McAfee of London.

Of Carlos Cardinal Artemis of Santa Cruz, Gilberto Levine y O'Brien of Rio.

Of David Cardinal Lloyd Spencer of Cardiff, Llyod CardiganPembroke of Tywyn.

Of Henri Cardinal Salvatore of New Orleans, Daniel Jean Boulle of Dax in France.

Of Nicholas Cardinal Gregorio of Messina, Arnolfo Rugutini of New York City.

Of Joseph Cardinal Doki of Douala, John Giwa of Anecho.

Of Kirol Cardinal Gabrailovitch of Zagreb, Mihail Majic of Trieste.

Of Martino Cardinal Erculo of Milan, Herman Hercules of uncertain domicile.

Of Xavier Cardinal Runosake of Kobe (the first dead of the contracted men), Niku Kazuko, probably of Honolulu.

These doubles were at least as hard to kill as were their primaries. The abdicated Cardinals, still about five hundred of them alive, weren't very hard to kill, but they just didn't give the same satisfaction as did the genuine Cardinals in Flight or Hiding.

There were funds provided to stir up public interest, and John Mogul skimmed twenty percent off of all such funds. So he launched a contest. This contest, with all the resources of 'Track and Total' behind it, offered one thousand very costly premiums to contestants for the best one thousand

suggestions for 'interesting and colorful murders'. Now there would be some popular action and interest.

Popular murder! Had there ever been anything like it! This was one of the primordial and archetypical fascinations. Who could resist it? There were more than thirty million entries in the contest. They came from the keen observers everywhere. They came from the depraved and the saintly: from the hunters and from the hunted. They even came from all eleven of the still living Princes in Flight. Ignatius Cardinal Ti sent in a murder right in line with his own approaching death. It wasn't used, in that exact form, but it wasn't too far off. All the abdicated Cardinals sent in murders, and all the doubles of the Cardinals in Flight sent in very ingenious murder-devices.

Most of these many millions of proposed methods of murder were not practical, for one reason or a thousand, and there was heavy repetition and duplication. But there were so many really good ones that it almost made one weep not to have a few million murders under contract at certain payment.

Instant mad dogs were good. The shot (it could be by air-gun or arrow or blow-gun, or directly by needle) might be made on the victim's own dog which would then go instantly mad and bite the nearest person, the victim, who would then die immediately. Then the dog would recover, without a trace, from his madness almost as immediately. But this depended on the dog's owner, the victim, being the closest person, so the plan could be disrupted by accident.

Directional shots were better, and these fitted in many of the submitted murders. And contagious directional shots were absolutely the best in this category. Some substance of the victim had to be mixed with the infusion, but it had to be no more than the faint scent of his passing. Any animal would be shot with this infusion in any way. The animal would then go into a murderous fury against the victim that he had been inoculated with. It would find the victim

anywhere, over dozens or hundreds or thousands of miles, and it would attack him in total fury. As to the contagious refinement, the inoculated animal, while on his murder pursuit, would bite all other animals of his sort that were anywhere near its path. And each bitten animal would immediately be similarly mad to murder that one victim. It would grow in an exponentially exploding chain reaction. It could be done with dogs, it could be done with cats, it could be done with wolves or squirrels or even rabbits.

It could be done with rats or mice. Imagine a victim becoming in an instant a living tower totally incased in thousands of mad mice! Imagine him screaming, and hundreds of mad mice pouring down his screaming throat through the mouth that he would never close again. Slashing and slicing as they went in in wave after wave, into the inmost depths of a person! Imagine the victim, with fifty pounds of meat already sheared off him in the second before he falls to the ground. Imagine him gushing open, and the thousand-fold hairy waves gushing into him faster than his own viscera can gush out. Really, this is one of the most charming concepts in all the annals of creative murder.

Mad birds could do it, pouring onto him from every sky and air. Or mad insects. Or mad tree toads. Or mad ants, a billion of them at least, covering a man a foot thick in a blanket of fiery death. Mad catfish could do it, pouring howling out of every water in relentless frenzy to take the victim wherever he might be found.

Mad microbes might do it also, high-speed-operating colonial microbes spreading and catching like fire. But here there are difficulties in viewing the mechanics of the death struggle. Persons inventing or proposing highly imaginative murders might also manage highly imaginative observation points. The mad microbe bit could be made workable, but it isn't for everyone.

And there is one special form. Mad three-year-old human children are excellent, and the implications open unheard of

vistas. Imagine a three-year-old child, patted and needle-pierced at the same time by an 'Oh what a handsome child you have there, madame' murderer. The child, quickly turned into a mad phenomenal creature, will break every barrier somehow and seek out its victim with uncanny directioning; and it will seek out many other three year olds on its mad career and bite them and envenom them, and these in turn will seek out the same prey in racing fury while they also bite and infect other three-year-olds. Imagine thirty thousand such three-year-olds converging on a victim within thirty minutes, getting to him no matter where he hides himself, eating the very doors of his house off their hinges to get to him, then eating his flesh and his bones and his marrow. (Little children everywhere love bone-marrow, but they do not always know that they love it.) Oh, wonderful, wonderful concepts!

Directional infra-red cookers were good, though perhaps a little bit overdone in several ways. One could put a directional nozzle on any such restaurant or home cooker and make it zero in on any organ of any man. It would cook the liver or heart of the victim where he stood, and leave no outer mark. It would cook his brains or his kidneys. There were many variations of this.

And there were the biodegradable murders. Biodegradables can be bought in any store, to turn noisome trash and accumulation back to basic earth. Lave it on a thing or spray it on, dust it as a powder or pour it as a liquid, the biodegradable stuff will disintegrate anything, and certainly it will rot a victim into good moist earth in hardly no time at all. Oh, only a little bit of it in a man's coffee or his wine, and he will begin to degrade from the inside out. He will provide good entertainment during the ten minutes it is going on, and then he will be stenchless and friable, slightly moist but not sopping, easily disposed of, and utilitarian.

Wonderful new inventions were made in the almost forgotten fields of floggings and crucifixions. These had already experienced a renaissance, and the second phase of a renaissance is the flowering of new art out of the new-turned soil. There were flaying machines such as our father never knew, and St. Andrew's and St. Peter's Crosses that spun like pinwheels and threw off messages in letters of fire. These were the 'Strange Fruit Trees' foretold again and again, and now made real.

Timed shrinking fabrics were good. They could be set for an hour or a day or a season. And inducing a person to wear them was no trick at all. A little flattery, a little salesmanship, and a person would be into a wonderful new outfit. Now these new fabrics were tough. The timing element had really been left optional by the makers, so that the dealer could cause the garment to disappear at whatever interval the market would stand. The shrinking element had been put in so that any of the clothes could be made to fit anybody. But both of these adjustments could be tampered with. It was fun to see a man being throttled by his own shirt collar, and there no way he could get out of it. It was fun to see a man cut in two by his own belt, or to see the hands of a lady severed off by the timed shrinking of her own cuffs, or to see a head crushed like a melon by its own hat.

But the real shrinking achievements were done by the infusions that would unsize both living and unliving stuff. This trick was at first ruled out as impractical by the Murder Contest judges, but a terrible howl went up at the exclusion. It was pointed out that the AAA International Material Handlers already had such shrink-powder and used it regularly. They used it for shipping bulk baled goods, reducing them to a very small size, and then enlarging them to original bulk at destination. And AAA had already shipped some people by this method, but it was very tricky and most

of them had died. But, since the technology was already in existence, the judges had to allow it.

The commoner form of the suggestions was to have the victim shrunk to small size where he could be done in by many different methods and could be subjected to indignities while he was being done in. But a more sophisticated way was to have the murderer shrink himself and so obtain strange entry and launch crunching internal attack.

Embulking pellets are good. Intrude one into the victim's food and he will grow exponentially till he explodes. All the modern techniques are fruitful, and all the old procedures can be refined. Implements are updated, and there are more imaginative sorts of debowelings suggested every day.

Killing with words was given a bloody literalness. This was a real triumph. Everyone was very pleased with the context. "It shows that *the people are still thinking*," one magistrate said.

John Mogul, the chief of 'Track and Total', held up his two hands with five digits extended on each of them to indicate that only ten of his primary targets were left alive and that three of them were dead. And round the world, song-singers and rope-jumpers gave his newest crowing and prediction, each in his own tongue:

"Ten little starvelings pale and thin
From empty pot to dine
Flay the tenth and show his skin,
Then there are nine."

This verse indicated that Cardinal Ti was dead and that the next in line was Cardinal Artemis of Santa Cruz, and that he would be flayed alive.

And after this, the killings would go much more quickly.

Persons in the same trade should know each other. The more specialized the trade is, the more restricted it is, so much the more the members of it be acquainted. When a trade is of an absolutely specialized nature, and the members of that trade are very small in number, their acquaintance is well-advised.

Count Finnegan and Herman Hercules both followed the trade of being doubles to Princes of the Ekklesia in Flight, a very specialized trade and one restricted to thirteen members. These two met by an arranged accident, and both of them were tracked and bugged wherever they went.

"I am an ugly little bugger, Finnegan," Herman said. "I do not mind this. There are many persons who like me and who even like my ugliness. My primary, Cardinal Erculo, is a beautiful little bugger, however. And yet we do look exactly alike. How can this be? It is not a question of a more beautiful soul shining out of him and making him beautiful. Finn, I don't know about my Cardinal but I do know about myself. I'm a good guy all the way through and I have a beautiful soul; I know this. And I do look beautiful when I'm playing the role of the Cardinal, and he does look ugly when he's playing the role of me. Roles will do a lot for one."

"Roles and settings," Count Finnegan said. "It reminds me of a great arrangement that was once presented to a highly select council for judgment. A group of artists of pure instinct had put this arrangement together. The question had been asked whether there was such a thing as beauty in arrangement and proportion, or whether the whole idea was a mere accommodation. The group of artists said that there *was* such a thing, and that they would be able to make a convincing approach to it, even if they could not absolutely effect the thing itself. One anti-artist who was there said that there was no such thing as beauty in arrangement or proportion, or in anything else. So the artistic arrangement

was made. It consisted mostly of objects, some of them brightly colored abstractions, some of them facsimiles, straight or offset, of real things. They were all well done. Lighting effects constituted other elements of the display, as did a faint dripping of music. Odors, nostalgic as well as symbolic, were other elements in the arrangement. It was excellent. The persons of the select council pronounced it to be something between a convincing approach to beauty in form and the absolute effecting of that beauty.

“ ‘Wait just one color-corrected minute!’ said the anti-artist. He picked up one of the thousand or so objects in the display and let the persons of the council view the thing with one piece missing. Then he put the piece back exactly as it had been. It was no use. The near approach to beauty had been shattered by that removal, and it could not be reconstructed by the replacement of the piece. It would be like trying to reassemble a soap-bubble that had burst.”

“And there will always be at least one anti-artist present,” said Herman Hercules. “That was good, Finnegan. That serves them right for bugging us. The bug will have recorded Count Finnegan the Artist talking like an artist, lest there be any doubt who you really are. But will any bug ever record Herman Hercules making a really convincing approach to beauty? I was a wrestler, Finnegan, in my youth and well into my middle age, and my ugliness was one of my attractions.”

“I know it. I saw you wrestle in New Orleans at the old Decatur Street Arena. I saw you once in a ‘Nine Man Free-Style Midget Wrestler Melee’.”

“Yes, that was before I was champion. For many years I was the ninety-nine pound champion of the world. As you know, one must be under five feet tall and under one hundred pounds to be a midget wrestler. I was just under in both respects. So is my primary, Cardinal Erculo. So was Saul whom I knew in old times.

“I always followed such jobs as would keep me near the things I loved and in the ambients I required for life, just as a fish will always take jobs that will keep him in contact with water. Oh, the things that I have always loved, they are stadiums, they are hippodromes, they are coliseums, they are arenas, they are grandstands, they are opera houses, they are circuses, they are fairs, they are carnivals, they are amusement parks, they are racetracks, they are music halls, they are even museums; they are forums, they are red-light districts (and I am virtuous), they are all-night restaurants and newsrooms, and penny arcades. They are six-day bicycle races; I love them. Aye, and they are army camps on battle eves. And they are prisons. They are any of these things when they are inhabited. Oh, Finn I like even all-night movies. Almost all of us long-timers have to be among crowds. I know that you are acquainted with many long-timers, Melchisedech, Gregorio, others. There are far more of us than you would guess, perhaps as many as one out of a hundred. In a city of five million persons, there will be fifty thousand of us, and our combined ages will probably be fifty million years. All of us, for reasons you would have to delve deep to uncover, like to be with crowds. We have the fear of being along. We have the fear of places closing up some hours out of the twenty-four. We are lonely in crowds, but that is better than being lonely alone. I remember Rome in the Empire Centuries, I remember Tarshish, I remember Babylon. Those were all raunchy towns, but they did have spectacles and crowds. To be with and before those crowds, I have been a tumbler and an acrobat and a tightrope walker. I've been a jockey of racing mules. I've been a candy butcher and concession boy, I've been a 'get your hamburger, get your hot-dog, get your Coney Island sandwich' peddler at every sort of ball game. And a side-show barker. I've been a dicer and a card-sharp, just so I could stay on top of the games and be with bunches of people when everyone else had gone home. There are

private sorts of people who have no need of crowds. I'm not one of them. Our Lord Himself was only partly one of them. He made His own crowds, but he needed something else. It was for this reason that he spent so little time in Judaea which was loaded with private kinds of people. He liked the mixed-blood country to the north better, the Dekapolis region where there were always spectacles going on. He liked horse races especially. I am a town boy myself. I never liked the green country except when I toured it with carnivals or horse-fairs. But I was more myself as a monkey-faced midget wrestler than as anything else.

"Now the Cardinal Erculo, of who I am the exact double, he is a lot like me in his love of spectacles. So was Saul. He was called a tent maker, but how many know that he was a maker of circus tents? But the Cardinal has a love for himself being too central to the spectacles. How he does love his Cardinal's box in his native Milano at La Scala, that holy mother of all opera houses! Ah, that old arena on Decatur Street in New Orleans where I used to wrestle, they tore it down, didn't they?"

"I think so, Herman. I have been in abeyance for a few decades until just lately so I've lost track. I've heard that they've even revived the old canard that there isn't any Decatur Street in New Orleans. Herman, you muscular little mutt, you'd be a good man in the high rigging of a ship that I know about. We're going on a voyage on that soon, I believe. It's a ship that I remember in a disjointed way. It's piloted by a man in a golden mask. I feel very strongly that I should know him, but he'll not be tricked out from behind that mask."

"Ah, you know him, Finn. You knew him for many years. And you may have sailed that ship even more than he has. I sailed with him recently. I didn't know him at first either, behind that mask. He says that it is for the vanity of the 'All of Us', the 'Ekklesia', that we must now be served by such outré instruments as himself, as thou, as I."

“He mentioned the two of us specifically as *outré* instruments?”

“He did. Then I knew him by the broaching of the wine and the baking of the beans. Yes, we go on that voyage soon. We sail with him within one hour. We do, if the ‘Track and Total’ agents do not kill us first.”

“My own double, the Cardinal Hedayat, who is pontiff *in petto* of God, tried to explain to someone recently the importance of the thing that we maintain, the thing that the world has set itself the task of stamping out. He said that it was a special dimension. He said that it was a necessary element in everything and that the world would not be the same world without it. He said that any mathematics that disregarded it as a function would be a false mathematics, and any physics or philosophy that failed to include it would be false and incomplete. It is a real intrusion into time and space, and it has changed time and space irreparably. I say that it is the source that enlivens, the spark that unites, the only live growing thing on which all other things are parasites. It is the covenant that has changed the form of everything.”

“But not everybody agrees which is the Covenant.”

“All the killers agree that this is the Covenant that they must kill. It is, among a hundred other things, a biological mutation. But biological mutations are chancy for quite a few centuries and subject to being wiped out by regressions. If we break this covenant, then we regress. By the covenant, we are already supermen. But if we refuse it we cannot go back to being natural men, we can only go back to nothing. We cannot now be natural men, if we ever could, which I doubt. We must be supernatural men (which is supermen), or we must be unnatural men or monsters. And monsters are never anything else than creatures on their way to extinction. I'd better go back to my room for an instant, if we are to sail within one hour.”

“No, Finn, you're dead if you go back to your room. They wait for you there.”

“Then I will just take a midnight stroll through Bally Alley for one more time. Come with me, Herman, mutt Hercules.”

“No. They're in Bally Alley too. We will go to the harbor by the ‘harbor express’. We've a half-chance of living through it if we go that way. We've no chance at all if we go any other way.”

The ‘harbor express’ was a crawl-way through and under the cellars of buildings and through the tunnels that connected them, through storm-sewers and through ceramic tiles that carried electrical feeders, through heat ducts and thieves' catacombs. And the ‘harbor express’ came out under wharfs somewhere. But the midget Hercules could go anywhere and Count Finnegan could go almost anywhere.

Had there somehow been a slight slip in the conversation of Herman Hercules? Had someone not learned that role quite well enough? How else, but for some slip, could Count Finnegan have known that this was Martino Cardinal Erculo of Milan hiding in the disguise of his own double, Herman Hercules, and that it was not Herman Hercules himself?

Or perhaps those weren't the exact cases either. Perhaps it wasn't given to anyone to know the exact identity of these two double or triple masqueraders.

8

The killings had been coming along almost as well as could have been desired. Less than fifty of the Abdicated Princes were left, but they didn't really amount to anything, anyhow. Only four of the Princes In Hiding were left alive and they did amount to something, but they were going fast. All thirteen of the doubles were still, as far as anyone knew,

alive; but they didn't amount to much either. They were a minor puzzle though.

"The doubles or shadows have all disappeared when their primaries disappear," John Mogul said, "but they haven't been accounted for. I believe that it's simply the case that dead men don't cast shadows."

A little horn-pipe music please. Then!

This is the ship that has rocked and rolled
And sailed in the scorchy zones.
This is the pilot who's thousands years old
(Skull for his face, and a mask of gold!),
And his hands are nothing but bones.

Finnegan, Gilbert, and Hercules
Ride in the troughs and rolls,
Under a spread of yard-arm trees,
Into the Santo Simeon Seas,
Into the Sea of Shoals.

Certainly dead men cast shadows. That's what history is about. John Mogul was wrong about the doubles or shadows ceasing to exist when their primaries were put under ground. All thirteen of the primaries had been buried now, under stones that read:

For Hedayat, "Upon this Peter I will build my church."

For Brokenbolt, "The Lord walking by the Sea of Galilee saw two brothers."

For Ti, "My chalice indeed you shall drink."

For Merry, "So I will have him remain until I come, what is that to thee?"

For Leviathan, "So long a time have I been with you and have you not known me?"

For Artemis, "This is the Israelite in whom there is no guile."

For Lloyd-Spencer, "And, leaving all things, he rose up, and followed him."

For Salvatore, "Lord, thou hast proved me and known me."

For Gregorio, "These seeing it shall be troubled with terrible fear, and shall be amazed at the suddenness of their unexpected salvation."

For Runosake, "—but others, save them, snatching them from the fire."

For Doki, "Their sound went forth into all the earth; and their words to the ends of the world."

For Gabrailovitch, "One of these must be made a witness with us of his resurrection."

For Erculo, "Thou art a vessel of election."

The last of the thirteen to die had been the prince of them all, the primary of Count Finnegan, Joseph Cardinal Hedayat of Antioch. His death (he was impaled upside down) was reported in the press as "Last Gate Swings".

But the 'Track and Total' people hadn't caught or killed any of the shadows yet, and now they didn't care very much. They didn't even put the murders out to sub-contract. But they did put prices on the heads of the thirteen shadows. And the shadow-men were converging on a part of the world where there were sharp bounty hunters on land and still sharper ones on the ocean. Private enterprise had not yet died out in some of those chopped-up little oceans. A man there would murder you for four dollars, but that was surely better than having him draw four dollars from some commonalty for doing no work at all.

Count Finnegan and Gilberto Levine-and-O'Brien and Herman Hercules, three double-men or shadow-men who had lost their primaries were sailing on a ringing bell-way in the ancestral ship named the *Argo*. The bell-ways were resonating channels in the ocean that led one straight to the one hundred booming bells around the mooring stone north of San Simeon. There had been, when the bells first began to summon and ring there, a premonition or prescience of great things to happen in an assembly there. But now all the great persons who had figured in the premonition were dead and

buried, the only part of any of them still above ground being the flayed skin of Cardinal Artemis. But the shadows of the great and hinge men were going to keep a rendezvous in the place of them. And there was a lot of shadow-play going on concerning their voyages. There was the pilot and captain of the *Argo* who had something very shadeful about him.

This captain and pilot wore a golden mask, a golden scarf around his neck, and golden gauntlets on his hands and wrists. These golden garments were made from combings of the Great Golden Fleece of Colchis Itself. All three of the doubles who had taken passage on the *Argo* knew this mysterious pilot; and one of them, Count Finnegan, had known him very well for many years. But an impediment was in-between. The pilot was swathed in gold fabric because the flesh was all gone off him and what was left was mostly bones. The pilot could not speak because of his throat condition (he had no flesh at all to his throat; he had, in fact, no throat; he had neck bones and nothing else in that region), but he could communicate. And he was always in good spirits. (His flesh had been reduced to ashes and now reposed in a cigar canister that had once belonged to the King of Spain, but his spirit and his bones were intact. He was, as everyone will guess soon or late, Melchisedech himself, the father of all magic men.)

The *Argo* sailed continuously against the wind and the currents, and it was not by ordinary standards a very seaworthy ship. The monkey-faced midget wrestler, Herman Hercules, was constantly cobbling things together in the high rigging, and Count Finnegan was often following the keel-haul around under the ship to make emergency repairs. But, of course, the *Argo* could never sink, not forever.

"Let me see thy skin, Gilberto," Count Finnegan said to his friend the Levine-O'Brien when they were half seas over. "You made certain marks on thy skin so you would know it if you ever saw it again."

“Oh, no, no, no,” Gilberto said, and he seemed a little bit frightened about it all. “Something has gone wrong with those marks so that I am not absolutely certain whether they are the same marks I made or not. It is a frightening thing to wake up on a morning and find oneself in somebody else's skin. It is equally frightening to be not really certain whether this has happened or not. The marks that are on the skin I am wearing now, they are very like the marks that I made on my own skin, and yet there is something about them that shouts ‘Forgery! Forgery!’.”

“Let me see them, Gilberto,” said Count Finnegan. “I watched you make the marks on your skin, and I have my fine artist's memory and sense of style for these things. I can spot forgery.”

“I'd rather not, Finnegan,” Gilberto said. “Let's leave it in doubt.”

The primary of Gilberto, Cardinal Artemis of Santa Cruz, had been flayed by one of those arranged accidents that had become common in the world. The Cardinal had gone to bless a new cork-cutting machine in Portugal, though knowing the danger of assassination. And when the blessing was finished, the machine was somehow joggled to *run*. It reached out its arms and took the Cardinal in its grasp. It flayed his skin off completely in one piece. The Cardinal died almost immediately afterwards. But the skin, the skin, which skin was it, and which man was wearing it at the time? Sometimes doubles will identify so completely with their primaries that there's no telling them apart.

There was something else here. Finnegan had painted, using a radiation imprinting technique, a masterwork at least as great as *‘The Resurrection of Count Finnegan’*, on the *endoderm*, the *inside of the skin* of Cardinal Artemis. He had done it when the Cardinal was hale and living, but the Cardinal hadn't known that he did it. Finnegan knew how to reproduce this inside-imprinted masterwork now. But was it on the inside of the trophy skin of the Cardinal that was now

cherished by John Mogul? Or was it on the inside of the skin of this Gilberto Levine-and-O'Brien who was beside Finnegan now? If John Mogul had seen the masterwork and if he had it beside him at all times, the exploding and kinetic beauty of the work may have accounted for the strange behavior of John Mogul at his end.

A Saucerite from the Big Triangle region joined them on the *Argo* when they were short days from the mooring-stone. He was a pleasant person.

"You four here are the only gentlemen I have met on World," he noted. "All others stare at me in that unseemly way that humans have. Then they poke at me with their fingers and ask me if I am one of the 'Big Brothers' sent to supervise their civilization. Do I look like a Big Brother?"

"You do, little owl-eyes, you do," said Herman Hercules. Herman and the Saucerite were about the same size.

"I am an eleven-year-old student," the Saucerite said. "And, taking advantage of a misunderstanding, I am enrolled in classes with eleven-year-old humans. But I cut a sort of path among those kids. In the evenings, in my saucer, I sweep back to my under-sea nest in the Triangle, and I often take several of my classmates with me. This makes me seem to be an important person to my classmates, and I love it."

"What school do you attend?" Gilberto asked him.

"Gaetano Polytech in Balbo City. Next season I will go to the University of Miami if I can get a chess scholarship."

"I want to poke you with my fingers myself, rude or not," Gilberto said. "Well, are you real? Tell me, and I won't have to poke you to find out."

"Does 'Reality' have to be that consensus grubbiness that calls itself 'real' on so many worlds? Oh, I'm real. But poke me, and your fingers will go right through me. Your world's like all the others."

"You're a poor student, Sauce, not to know that our world is unique," the fleshless Melchisedech, pilot and captain,

said. "We are *not* like other worlds. You must realize that."

"Oh, your world is of special interest, of course, since it is the 'World of the Covenant'," the young Saucerite said. "But it isn't a world of special accomplishment or attainment. That some of you are really the first super-people is likely, and that you carry super-seed is almost certain. But the results aren't overwhelming. There's unevenness in you, and the super-tang is rare. It's because of your special category and dimension that we send more students here than to many other places. It's because of your unevenness and barren areas that so many of us students return as empty-minded as we were when we left home.

"But some few of you are die-hards, and this interests us. Most of us, most of the people everywhere, are die-easies; you are different. I'll be covering the Conclave at Mooring-Stone for a little press network of which you likely haven't heard."

Three others of the double-men or shadow-men, Cecil Octavian of England who was the double to the dead Cardinal Brokenbolt of Australia, Niku Kazuko of Honolulu who was double to the dead Cardinal Runosake of Kobe, Daniel Jean Boulle who was the double of the dead Cardinal Salvatore of New Orleans, were coming up from along the Mexican coast in a tramp steamer. They had been impersonating archeologists for the purpose of deceiving assassins and bounty hunters, and it was in their archeological activity that they had acquired the presence of a person who was about as archeo as one can be.

"It isn't a bad life," this very odd person gave the stony communication. "We were the High Lords once and we had everything our way. We had the jaguar by the tail, as they say, and the Jaguar in the Sky was our own constellation. We were the Lords of the Square Hills which you now call the pyramids of Quintana Roo. The Holy Hills had grace then. They didn't seem so square-tapered and flat-headed as they

are now, not before the spirit went out of them. And we had bells then, gold bells. Did any of you ever hear the rich clanging of solid gold bells?

"We understood prophecy. We knew that there would be a Pact and a Lineage. We were pretty sure that the Pact would be with us. Should it be with the monkeys of the trees, or the humans of the river shores, or the alligators of the swamps, or the whales of the ocean, when we were there? We were the Pyramid Lords. We were the Rulers of the World. We had a touch of the divine fire; we could feel it in us. We still have it. We maintained order in the world. The monkeys and humans and alligators and whales were our cattle.

"We set our golden bells to booming to call God to come down. I believe now that we were too early by a few thousand years. The bells set up a golden roaring with words; 'We have pen and ink here,' they called, 'Come down with the Pact and we will sign it and then You can countersign it.' 'Be quiet,' God said. 'It isn't even morning yet.' 'Come down with the Pact,' we set our bells to speaking, 'and bring the morning with you when you come. We are ready now.' 'Be quiet,' God said again. We rang the bells still louder. He came down then. And He turned all of us to stone. 'Now you will be quiet,' He said.

"So we have been stone-stiff and buried inside our pyramids since then, except that one of us is allowed to move about every few centuries, as I do now, and bring news to his fellows. 'But I will not forget you,' God had said on that day when He turned us to stone. 'I will always treat kindly with you. And I have wonderful things in mind for you, after a few thousand years. Until then, be quiet.' So He made a Pact with the humans instead, a puzzling choice, and He made it with an unlikely variety of them. And then He renewed the Pact, with the most uncouth humans ever. So be it.

"But now we have heard the bells ringing again, not gold bells as we once had, but bells nevertheless. I've come to

report on the event, for an underground press of which you have not heard. It is the Pyramid Roots publication, and it is circulated entirely underground, from the roots of one pyramid to those of another. Why do we not have fresh lamb on this voyage? On the *Argo*, Melchisedech gives them fresh lamb."

This rock-headed person was something of a clown, but it is distinction aplenty for a person made entirely of stone even to walk and talk. And Rocky was a pleasant companion, and he knew the passages through the shoals. He himself had laid these passages out originally, he said.

Three others of the double-men or shadow-men, Bolo Manolo, Douglas McAfee, Lloyd Cardigan-Pembroke the pig butcher of Tywyn in Wales, came down from Bimini on a luxury yacht, and they looked to be the richest and sportiest fishermen ever. They didn't talk with any Saucerites or Pyramid Lords. But there was one ancestral dolphin who followed along with them and spoke to them when they dangled a coded communication apparatus overboard.

Yes, the dolphin knew about the Testament, the Pact, the Covenant also. What creature does not know about it? He knew about the line which is the life-line of the world. He had expected, as they all had, that the Pact would be made with the dolphins as the most intelligent and most obedient creatures in the world. It wasn't. The Pact was made with humans, and it contained the sad clause that other humans would try to nullify it until the end of time. But the dolphins accepted their being passed over for the lesser folk. They had a bell of their own, the dolphin said, and it was the largest bell in the world. A number of the dolphin's fellows were towing it, and were already quite near to the Mooring-Stone.

"Should we set it to ringing again in the great underwater?" he asked.

"Do so," said the shadow-man Lloyd Cardigan-Pembroke the pig butcher from Wales, the double of the dead Cardinal Ti. "We can't have too many bells."

"Are any of you double-men familiar with the grass of the very long roots and the red tinge in its green that used to grow on Vatican Hill and nowhere else in the world?" the Dolphin asked conversationally. "It was named 'Blood-of-Martyrs Grass'."

"We are all familiar with it," Bolo Manolo said. "It grew in only that one place in the world and now it grows there no more. It is finished."

"Not so," said the Dolphin. "It is growing here now, up from these waters, and it has covered the mooring-stone with its thin carpet of red-flecked green. And the temperature of the water is rising, and the land itself is rising. Rejoice, for the martyr grass has come back."

The Dolphin left them then to see about setting the big Dolphin Bell. In about an hour the men felt the underwater clanging from the biggest bell in the world, and it raised up their spirits like ocean waves.

The yacht went into the mooring-stone, as had the *Argo*, as had the tramp steamer from along the Mexican coast. Then the bounty-men who had the place encircled said that the bag was full enough, and they decided to pull the draw-string on it. But, somehow, they couldn't quite do it.

The bounty-men had nine priced men and three craft inside their bag, at Mooring-Stone, and now they would kill them and collect their price. The bounty-men knew those shoal-waters, and they knew how to close in on prey. But things had gone wrong for them. The shoal-waters were changing by the minute, by the second, and the bounty-men were being dashed to their deaths. Strange killer-shoals were appearing everywhere.

But four other double-men or shadow-men came through anyhow, after the bounty-men had thought they had slammed the shoaly gates. Arnoldo Rugutini of New York

City, the double of Cardinal Gregorio of Messina, came in on an army copter. It landed him, and it whirled off again. Arnaldo had connections for things like that.

Mihail Majic, the double of Cardinal Gabrailovitch of Zagreb, swam in, a fifty mile swim in the open ocean. He was a World Class Swimmer.

Emmet Collins of Boston, Massachusetts, the double of Cardinal Merry of Cork, talked his way in. He came in a little boat that you wouldn't believe. He stopped at a nest of bounty-men and talked to them. He told them that he was a follow-up man for 'Track and Total' and that he was checking up on the job to see that nothing went wrong. He would signal to them from Mooring-Stone, he said, when it was time for them to go in for the kill. And they let him go in. And only when he was out of their immediate reach did they howl at themselves and wonder who had stolen their wits. It was the silliest story anybody had ever made up, and how had they been taken in by it? Oh, if you hadn't heard that Emmet Collins talk, do not ask how anybody could have been taken in by him. Since the world began, no man had ever talked as he talked.

The thirteenth of the double-men was John Giwa from Anecho in Africa. He was the double of dead Cardinal Doki of Douala. John Giwa had flown from Anecho to Marseille in France by commercial flight. He broke in on John Mogul there. He cut the twelve digits from Mogul's hands and wrapped them in butcher's paper to take with him. He put a skewer through Mogul's tongue when that man became too loud. He took a waiting charter flight to Miami. He took a barn-stormer down over Mooring-Rock, and he came down on the rock with a scarlet parachute. Then he went down into the underground cave or room that had been named 'The Room of the Conclave' when it was hewn out of the rock four hundred years before. (This popular name for the room had always been a mystery.) He found the other twelve double-men or shadow-men already there.

John Giwa banged his hands together loudly. "Holy men, let us get started!" he cried.

9

One other man then came into this strange room in the middle of the rock. This was Monsignor X of the ill-famed Roman-Babylonian Conclave which was supposed to end all conclaves.

"The Conclave must have a Servitor," X said. How did he get there anyhow? He brought the Triple Crown with him, or at least a double of it. Where did he get it? How did he get it there?

"Is that volcanic activity I feel or is it an effusion of special grace?" John Giwa asked himself and all of them. "We know from our inner revelation," he went on, "that all thirteen of us are not double-men or shadow-men. One or more of us is a primary man, a true Cardinal. Only one is required. One lone Cardinal left in the world could hold his own private conclave and nominate himself Pope. And the Holy Ghost would confirm that nomination."

The violent-and-holy-man John Giwa then dumped out twelve curled and blood-caked things. They were the twelve severed fingers and thumbs of John Mogul the contract murderer. John Giwa dumped them as if they were snakes. They did move themselves and writhe. Then, coming into a pattern, they reared themselves furiously and extended themselves upward in trembling anger as if swearing vengeance.

Yes, there was both volcanic activity going on and an effusion of very special grace. In ten minutes, a sea-soaked country of ten thousand square kilometers rose above the level of the sea. And the Mooring-Rock, three square kilometers of it, rose a hundred meters above its countryside.

“Mooring-Stone,” John Giwa spoke the blessing to the new land above his head which he could sense but could not see. “Your old name of *Babylonia Oceania* now becomes *Babylonia Sancta*.” It was now changed from Oceanic Babylon to Holy Babylon.

Each of the thirteen members of the conclave gave a short talk. Then X asked the golden-masked Melchisedech to give a talk also.

“But I am a dead man,” Melchisedech explained.

“Dead man, speak us live words,” John Giwa said. And he did so.

“Then X called their names for the vote. One of them, Count Finnegan, said “*abstineo*”, “I abstain.” The other twelve all voted for the same person. Then X placed the triple crown on the head of John Finnegan Solli. John Giwa said “Reign in grace, Pope Finnegan the First.”

Was that the sound of mule-laughter ringing around the world? Many, many people loved Finnegan, but everybody found it the wildest joke ever that he should also be crowned Pope. Mule laughter, yes, and bleaker laughter also, and naked fury rising to the skies.

“My god, my god! (pardon the phrase, Ungodly Oaf), but it's the case of volcanic activity riding to the rescue like the old U.S. Cavalry,” the Angry League people shrieked. “The ultimate in lack of style, and corn, corn, forever corn!”

Pope Finnegan essayed a bit of humor to the conclave.

“This has been an Eschatological Comedy,” he said, “and stagewise—(what is that sound, giggling or the agony of a lost soul?)—and stagewise (with the world as stage) it has been a good comedy except for one thing. (Oh what is that tortured giggling?) There were no roles for women in the comedy; that was its lone defect.”

Then, like a silvery dam breaking, there was the sound of a most extraordinary laughing in high glee after many months of holding her laughter.

“Terence Cardinal Mercy of Cork, or else Emmet Collins of Boston, whichever it is, thou art a woman,” John Giwa spoke in a stern voice. “Explain this, X, it's an antic of thine. Finnegan himself was never capable of such.”

Well, if you were X and pressed to get an impersonator for Cardinal Merry, the hardest of all the cardinals to impersonate, why not get the best impersonator in the world? And on stage or on airways, a young lady named Emma Collins was the greatest impersonator in the world, of anything, of anybody. And she was a protégé of X, an old actor and impersonator himself.

But how in hickory-fired hades was Finnegan a true Cardinal? Oh, the last Pope before Finnegan, Paul the Eleventh, had named Finnegan a Cardinal *in petto* (secretly, in the breast) the afternoon that Finnegan had painted a quick but absolutely extraordinary portrait of that Pope. That was just one week before the murderous death of Paul the Eleventh.

“Finnegan, you are either here in ghost-flesh or else you have the gift of bi-location, something that only the greatest Saints have,” the Pope said.

“You are wrong, Holy Father,” Finnegan told him. “The greatest devils have the gift of bi-location also, but I am neither.”

Finnegan being named a Cardinal secretly, only three persons knew of the fact: Finnegan himself, Paul the Eleventh who named him, and the Holy Ghost. It was the Holy Ghost (never very good at keeping a secret) who leaked the information to the voters (there were two other real Cardinals among them) at the Conclave at Mooring Rock.

So the reign of Pope Finnegan the First (a big-nosed clown, a world-wanderer, and a master artist) began on a joyful note. One half of the people in the world, plus one, approved of it all. This confounded and mystified all the

pollsters who had predicted an approval of less than one tenth of one percent.

And Pope Finnegan fit in so perfectly with the prediction of the prophet Nostradamus, made just 430 years before:

When guiding light seemed ever quenched
Then Clio's very road he wrenched
Back to the true and happy way.
He is the Pope of Bells and Bay.
His coming is a joy to see.
Upon his shield a Green Bay Tree,
A staff, a paint-box, and a rose.
Outstanding is his holy nose.

But the people of the Angry League did not approve at all. They raised their furious voices to the skies.

"Corn, corn, shameful corn! The lack of true style in all of this is a planetary disgrace. A happy ending yet!! The ultimate of abominations!!!"

And there was heart-rending wailing and the colossal gnashing of teeth.





